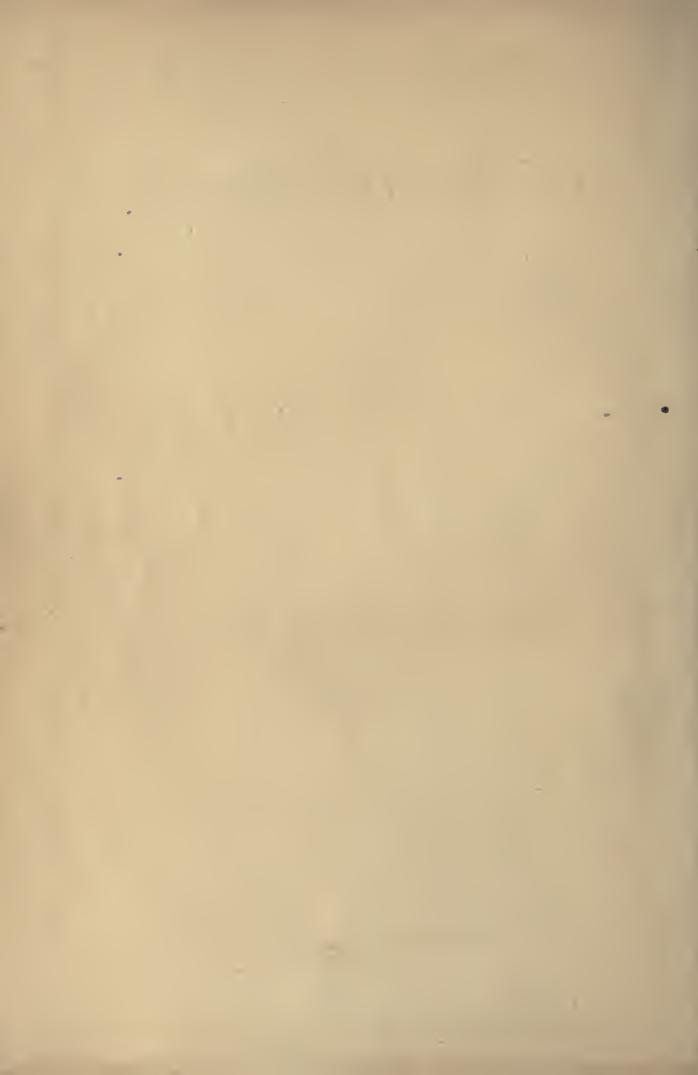


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In the Wilderness.

BY

CHARLES DUDLEY WARNER,

AUTHOR OF "MY SUMMER IN A GARDEN," "BACKLOG STUDIES,"
"SAUNTERINGS," ETC.



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IN THE WILDERNESS.

I.

HOW I KILLED A BEAR.

SO many conflicting accounts have appeared about my casual encounter with an Adirondack bear last summer, that in justice to the public, to myself, and to the bear, it is necessary to make a plain statement of the facts. Besides, it is so seldom I have occasion to kill a bear, that the celebration of the exploit may be excused.

The encounter was unpremeditated on both sides. I was not hunting for a bear, and I have no reason to suppose that a bear was looking for me. The fact is, that we were both out blackberrying, and met by chance,—the usual way. There is among the Adirondack visitors

always a great deal of conversation about bears, — a general expression of the wish to see one in the woods, and much speculation as to how a person would act if he or she chanced to meet one. But bears are scarce and timid, and appear only to a favored few.

It was a warm day in August, just the sort of day when an adventure of any kind seemed impossible. But it occurred to the housekeepers at our cottage — there were four of them — to send me to the clearing, on the mountain back of the house, to pick blackberries. It was rather a series of small clearings, running up into the forest, much overgrown with bushes and briars, and not unromantic. Cows pastured there, penetrating through the leafy passages from one opening to another, and browsing among the bushes. I was kindly furnished with a six-quart pail, and told not to be gone long.

Not from any predatory instinct, but to save appearances, I took a gun. It adds to the manly aspect of a person with a tin pail if he also carries a gun. It was possible I might start up a

partridge; though how I was to hit him, if he started up instead of standing still, puzzled me. Many people use a shot-gun for partridges. I prefer the rifle: it makes a clean job of death, and does not prematurely stuff the bird with globules of lead. The rifle was a Sharp's, carrying a ball-cartridge (ten to the pound), — an excellent weapon belonging to a friend of mine, who had intended, for a good many years back, to kill a deer with it. He could hit a tree with it — if the wind did not blow, and the atmosphere was just right, and the tree was not too far off — nearly every time. Of course, the tree must have some size. Needless to say that I was at that time no sportsman. Years ago I killed a robin under the most humiliating circumstances. The bird was in a low cherry-tree. I loaded a big shot-gun pretty full, crept up under the tree, rested the gun on the fence, with the muzzle more than ten feet from the bird, shut both eyes, and pulled the trigger. When I got up to see what had happened, the robin was scattered about under the tree in more than a thousand pieces,

no one of which was big enough to enable a naturalist to decide from it to what species it belonged. This disgusted me with the life of a sportsman. I mention the incident to show, that, although I went blackberrying armed, there was not much inequality between me and the bear.

In this blackberry-patch bears had been seen. The summer before, our colored cook, accompanied by a little girl of the vicinage, was picking berries there one day, when a bear came out of the woods, and walked towards them. The girl took to her heels, and escaped. Aunt Chloe was paralyzed with terror. Instead of attempting to run, she sat down on the ground where she was standing, and began to weep and scream, giving herself up for lost. The bear was bewildered by this conduct. He approached and looked at her; he walked around and surveyed her. Probably he had never seen a colored person before, and did not know whether she would agree with him: at any rate, after watching her a few moments, he turned about, and went into the forest. This is an authentic instance of the deli-

cate consideration of a bear, and is much more remarkable than the forbearance towards the African slave of the well-known lion, because the bear had no thorn in his foot.

When I had climbed the hill, I set up my rifle against a tree, and began picking berries, lured on from bush to bush by the black gleam of fruit (that always promises more in the distance than it realizes when you reach it) ; penetrating farther and farther, through leaf-shaded cow-paths flecked with sunlight, into clearing after clearing. I could hear on all sides the tinkle of bells, the cracking of sticks, and the stamping of cattle that were taking refuge in the thicket from the flies. Occasionally, as I broke through a covert, I encountered a meek cow, who stared at me stupidly for a second, and then shuffled off into the brush. I became accustomed to this dumb society, and picked on in silence, attributing all the wood-noises to the cattle, thinking nothing of any real bear. In point of fact, however, I was thinking all the time of a nice romantic bear, and, as I picked, was composing a story about a

generous she-bear who had lost her cub, and who seized a small girl in this very wood, carried her tenderly off to a cave, and brought her up on bear's milk and honey. When the girl got big enough to run away, moved by her inherited instincts, she escaped, and came into the valley to her father's house (this part of the story was to be worked out, so that the child would know her father by some family resemblance, and have some language in which to address him), and told him where the bear lived. The father took his gun, and, guided by the unfeeling daughter, went into the woods and shot the bear, who never made any resistance, and only, when dying, turned reproachful eyes upon her murderer. The moral of the tale was to be kindness to animals.

I was in the midst of this tale, when I happened to look some rods away to the other edge of the clearing, and there was a bear! He was standing on his hind-legs, and doing just what I was doing, — picking blackberries. With one paw he bent down the bush, while with the other he clawed the berries into his mouth, — green

ones and all. To say that I was astonished is inside the mark. I suddenly discovered that I didn't want to see a bear, after all. At about the same moment the bear saw me, stopped eating berries, and regarded me with a glad surprise. It is all very well to imagine what you would do under such circumstances. Probably you wouldn't do it: I didn't. The bear dropped down on his fore-feet, and came slowly towards me. Climbing a tree was of no use, with so good a climber in the rear. If I started to run, I had no doubt the bear would give chase; and although a bear cannot run down hill as fast as he can run up hill, yet I felt that he could get over this rough, brush-tangled ground faster than I could.

The bear was approaching. It suddenly occurred to me how I could divert his mind until I could fall back upon my military base. My pail was nearly full of excellent berries, — much better than the bear could pick himself. I put the pail on the ground, and slowly backed away from it, keeping my eye, as beast-tamers do, on the bear. The ruse succeeded.

The bear came up to the berries, and stopped. Not accustomed to eat out of a pail, he tipped it over, and nosed about in the fruit, "gorming" (if there is such a word) it down, mixed with leaves and dirt, like a pig. The bear is a worse feeder than the pig. Whenever he disturbs a maple-sugar camp in the spring, he always upsets the buckets of sirup, and tramples round in the sticky sweets, wasting more than he eats. The bear's manners are thoroughly disagreeable.

As soon as my enemy's head was down, I started and ran. Somewhat out of breath, and shaky, I reached my faithful rifle. It was not a moment too soon. I heard the bear crashing through the brush after me. Enraged at my duplicity, he was now coming on with blood in his eye. I felt that the time of one of us was probably short. The rapidity of thought at such moments of peril is well known. I thought an octavo volume, had it illustrated and published, sold fifty thousand copies, and went to Europe on the proceeds, while that bear was loping across the clearing. As I was cocking the gun, I made

a hasty and unsatisfactory review of my whole life. I noted, that, even in such a compulsory review, it is almost impossible to think of any good thing you have done. The sins come out uncommonly strong. I recollected a newspaper subscription I had delayed paying years and years ago, until both editor and newspaper were dead, and which now never could be paid to all eternity.

The bear was coming on.

I tried to remember what I had read about encounters with bears. I couldn't recall an instance in which a man had run away from a bear in the woods and escaped, although I recalled plenty where the bear had run from the man and got off. I tried to think what is the best way to kill a bear with a gun, when you are not near enough to club him with the stock. My first thought was to fire at his head; to plant the ball between his eyes: but this is a dangerous experiment. The bear's brain is very small: and, unless you hit that, the bear does not mind a bullet in his head; that is, not at the time. I remem-

bered that the instant death of the bear would follow a bullet planted just back of his fore-leg, and sent into his heart. This spot is also difficult to reach, unless the bear stands off, side towards you, like a target. I finally determined to fire at him generally.

The bear was coming on.

The contest seemed to me very different from any thing at Creedmoor. I had carefully read the reports of the shooting there ; but it was not easy to apply the experience I had thus acquired. I hesitated whether I had better fire lying on my stomach ; or lying on my back, and resting the gun on my toes. But in neither position, I reflected, could I see the bear until he was upon me. The range was too short ; and the bear wouldn't wait for me to examine the thermometer, and note the direction of the wind. Trial of the Creedmoor method, therefore, had to be abandoned ; and I bitterly regretted that I had not read more accounts of offhand shooting.

For the bear was coming on.

I tried to fix my last thoughts upon my family.

As my family is small, this was not difficult. Dread of displeasing my wife, or hurting her feelings, was uppermost in my mind. What would be her anxiety as hour after hour passed on, and I did not return ! What would the rest of the household think as the afternoon passed, and no blackberries came ! What would be my wife's mortification when the news was brought that her husband had been eaten by a bear ! I cannot imagine any thing more ignominious than to have a husband eaten by a bear. And this was not my only anxiety. The mind at such times is not under control. With the gravest fears the most whimsical ideas will occur. I looked beyond the mourning friends, and thought what kind of an epitaph they would be compelled to put upon the stone. Something like this : —

HERE LIE THE REMAINS

OF

————— ,

EATEN BY A BEAR

Aug. 20, 1877.

It is a very unheroic and even disagreeable

epitaph. That “eaten by a bear” is intolerable. It is grotesque. And then I thought what an inadequate language the English is for compact expression. It would not answer to put upon the stone simply “eaten;” for that is indefinite, and requires explanation: it might mean eaten by a cannibal. This difficulty could not occur in the German, where *essen* signifies the act of feeding by a man, and *fressen* by a beast. How simple the thing would be in German! —

HIER LIEGT
HOCHWOHLGEBOREN
HERR ——— ———,

GEFRESSEN
Aug. 20, 1877.

That explains itself. The well-born one was eaten by a beast, and presumably by a bear, — an animal that has a bad reputation since the days of Elisha.

The bear was coming on; he had, in fact, come on. I judged that he could see the whites of my eyes. All my subsequent reflections were confused. I raised the gun, covered the bear's

breast with the sight, and let drive. Then I turned, and ran like a deer. I did not hear the bear pursuing. I looked back. The bear had stopped. He was lying down. I then remembered that the best thing to do after having fired your gun is to reload it. I slipped in a charge, keeping my eyes on the bear. He never stirred. I walked back suspiciously. There was a quiver in the hind-legs, but no other motion. Still he might be shamming: bears often sham. To make sure, I approached, and put a ball into his head. He didn't mind it now: he minded nothing. Death had come to him with a merciful suddenness. He was calm in death. In order that he might remain so, I blew his brains out, and then started for home. I had killed a bear!

Notwithstanding my excitement, I managed to saunter into the house with an unconcerned air. There was a chorus of voices:—

“Where are your blackberries?”

“Why were you gone so long?”

“Where's your pail?”

“I left the pail.”

“Left the pail? What for?”

“A bear wanted it.”

“Oh, nonsense!”

“Well, the last I saw of it, a bear had it.”

“Oh, come! You didn’t really see a bear?”

“Yes, but I did really see a real bear.”

“Did he run?”

“Yes: he ran after me.”

“I don’t believe a word of it. What did you do?”

“Oh! nothing particular — except kill the bear.”

Cries of “Gammon!” “Don’t believe it!”
“Where’s the bear?”

“If you want to see the bear, you must go up into the woods. I couldn’t bring him down alone.”

Having satisfied the household that something extraordinary had occurred, and excited the post-humous fear of some of them for my own safety, I went down into the valley to get help. The great bear-hunter, who keeps one of the summer boarding-houses, received my story with a smile

of incredulity ; and the incredulity spread to the other inhabitants and to the boarders as soon as the story was known. However, as I insisted in all soberness, and offered to lead them to the bear, a party of forty or fifty people at last started off with me to bring the bear in. Nobody believed there was any bear in the case ; but everybody who could get a gun carried one ; and we went into the woods armed with guns, pistols, pitchforks, and sticks, against all contingencies or surprises, — a crowd made up mostly of scoffers and jeerers.

But when I led the way to the fatal spot, and pointed out the bear, lying peacefully wrapped in his own skin, something like terror seized the boarders, and genuine excitement the natives. It was a no-mistake bear, by George ! and the hero of the fight — well, I will not insist upon that. But what a procession that was, carrying the bear home ! and what a congregation was speedily gathered in the valley to see the bear ! Our best preacher up there never drew any thing like it on Sunday.

And I must say that my particular friends, who were sportsmen, behaved very well, on the whole. They didn't deny that it was a bear, although they said it was small for a bear. Mr. Deane, who is equally good with a rifle and a rod, admitted that it was a very fair shot. He is probably the best salmon-fisher in the United States, and he is an equally good hunter. I suppose there is no person in America who is more desirous to kill a moose than he. But he needlessly remarked, after he had examined the wound in the bear, that he had seen that kind of a shot made by a cow's horn.

This sort of talk affected me not. When I went to sleep that night, my last delicious thought was, "I've killed a bear!"





II.

LOST IN THE WOODS.

IT ought to be said, by way of explanation, that my being lost in the woods was not premeditated. Nothing could have been more informal. This apology can be necessary only to those who are familiar with the Adirondack literature. Any person not familiar with it would see the absurdity of one going to the Northern Wilderness with the deliberate purpose of writing about himself as a lost man. It may be true, that a book about this wild tract would not be recognized as complete without a lost-man story in it; since it is almost as easy for a stranger to get lost in the Adirondacks as in Boston. I merely desire to say that my unimportant adventure is not narrated in answer

to the popular demand, and I do not wish to be held responsible for its variation from the typical character of such experiences.

We had been in camp a week, on the Upper Ausable Lake. This is a gem — emerald or turquoise as the light changes it — set in the virgin forest. It is not a large body of water, is irregular in form, and about a mile and a half in length; but in the sweep of its wooded shores, and the lovely contour of the lofty mountains that guard it, the lake is probably the most charming in America. Why the young ladies and gentlemen who camp there occasionally vex the days and nights with hooting, and singing sentimental songs, is a mystery even to the laughing loon.

I left my companions there one Saturday morning, to return to Keene Valley, intending to fish down the Ausable River. The Upper Lake discharges itself into the Lower by a brook which winds through a mile and a half of swamp and woods. Out of the north end of the Lower Lake, which is a huge sink in the mountains, and

mirrors the savage precipices, the Ausable breaks its rocky barriers, and flows through a wild gorge, several miles, to the valley below. Between the Lower Lake and the settlements is an extensive forest, traversed by a cart-path, admirably constructed of loose stones, roots of trees, decayed logs, slippery rocks, and mud. The gorge of the river forms its western boundary. I followed this caricature of a road a mile or more; then gave my luggage to the guide to carry home, and struck off through the forest, by compass, to the river. I promised myself an exciting scramble down this little-frequented cañon, and a creel full of trout. There was no difficulty in finding the river, or in descending the steep precipice to its bed: getting into a scrape is usually the easiest part of it. The river is strewn with bowlders, big and little, through which the amber water rushes with an unceasing thunderous roar, now plunging down in white falls, then swirling round in dark pools. The day, already past meridian, was delightful; at least, the blue strip of it I could see overhead.

Better pools and rapids for trout never were, I thought, as I concealed myself behind a boulder, and made the first cast. There is nothing like the thrill of expectation over the first throw in unfamiliar waters. Fishing is like gambling, in that failure only excites hope of a fortunate throw next time. There was no rise to the "leader" on the first cast, nor on the twenty-first; and I cautiously worked my way down stream, throwing right and left. When I had gone half a mile, my opinion of the character of the pools was unchanged: never were there such places for trout; but the trout were out of their places. Perhaps they didn't care for the fly: some trout seem to be so unsophisticated as to prefer the worm. I replaced the fly with a baited hook: the worm squirmed; the waters rushed and roared; a cloud sailed across the blue: no trout rose to the lonesome opportunity. There is a certain companionship in the presence of trout, especially when you can feel them flopping in your fish-basket; but it became evident that there were no trout in this wilderness, and a

sense of isolation for the first time came over me. There was no living thing near. The river had by this time entered a deeper gorge; walls of rocks rose perpendicularly on either side, — picturesque rocks, painted many colors by the oxide of iron. It was not possible to climb out of the gorge; it was impossible to find a way by the side of the river; and getting down the bed, over the falls, and through the flumes, was not easy, and consumed time.

Was that thunder? Very likely. But thunder-showers are always brewing in these mountain-fortresses, and it did not occur to me that there was any thing personal in it. Very soon, however, the hole in the sky closed in, and the rain dashed down. It seemed a providential time to eat my luncheon; and I took shelter under a scraggy pine that had rooted itself in the edge of the rocky slope. The shower soon passed, and I continued my journey, creeping over the slippery rocks, and continuing to show my confidence in the unresponsive trout. The way grew wilder and more grewsome. The thunder began again,

rolling along over the tops of the mountains, and reverberating in sharp concussions in the gorge: the lightning also darted down into the darkening passage, and then the rain. Every enlightened being, even if he is in a fisherman's dress of shirt and pantaloons, hates to get wet; and I ignominiously crept under the edge of a sloping boulder. It was all very well at first, until streams of water began to crawl along the face of the rock, and trickle down the back of my neck. This was refined misery, unheroic and humiliating, as suffering always is when unaccompanied by resignation.

A longer time than I knew was consumed in this and repeated efforts to wait for the slackening and renewing storm to pass away. In the intervals of calm I still fished, and even descended to what a sportsman considers incredible baseness: I put a "sinker" on my line. It is the practice of the country-folk, whose only object is to get fish, to use a good deal of bait, sink the hook to the bottom of the pools, and wait the slow appetite of the summer trout. I tried this also. I might as well have fished in a

pork-barrel. It is true, that, in one deep, black, round pool, I lured a small trout from the bottom, and deposited him in the creel; but it was an accident. Though I sat there in the awful silence (the roar of water and thunder only emphasized the stillness) full half an hour, I was not encouraged by another nibble. Hope, however, did not die: I always expected to find the trout in the next flume; and so I toiled slowly on, unconscious of the passing time. At each turn of the stream I expected to see the end, and at each turn I saw a long, narrow stretch of rocks and foaming water. Climbing out of the ravine was, in most places, simply impossible; and I began to look with interest for a slide, where bushes rooted in the scant earth would enable me to scale the precipice. I did not doubt that I was nearly through the gorge. I could at length see the huge form of the Giant of the Valley, scarred with avalanches, at the end of the vista; and it seemed not far off. But it kept its distance, as only a mountain can, while I stumbled and slid down the rocky way. The rain had now set in

with persistence, and suddenly I became aware that it was growing dark ; and I said to myself, “ If you don’t wish to spend the night in this horrible chasm, you’d better escape speedily.” Fortunately I reached a place where the face of the precipice was bush-grown, and with considerable labor scrambled up it.

Having no doubt that I was within half a mile, perhaps within a few rods, of the house above the entrance of the gorge, and that, in any event, I should fall into the cart-path in a few minutes, I struck boldly into the forest, congratulating myself on having escaped out of the river. So sure was I of my whereabouts, that I did not note the bend of the river, nor look at my compass. The one trout in my basket was no burden, and I stepped lightly out.

The forest was of hard-wood, and open, except for a thick undergrowth of moose-bush. It was raining, — in fact, it had been raining, more or less, for a month, — and the woods were soaked. This moose-bush is most annoying stuff to travel through in a rain ; for the broad leaves slap one

in the face, and sop him with wet. The way grew every moment more dingy. The heavy clouds above the thick foliage brought night on prematurely. It was decidedly premature to a near-sighted man, whose glasses the rain rendered useless: such a person ought to be at home early. On leaving the river-bank I had borne to the left, so as to be sure to strike either the clearing or the road, and not wander off into the measureless forest. I confidently pursued this course, and went gayly on by the left flank. That I did not come to any opening or path, only showed that I had slightly mistaken the distance: I was going in the right direction.

I was so certain of this, that I quickened my pace, and got up with alacrity every time I tumbled down amid the slippery leaves and catching roots, and hurried on. And I kept to the left. It even occurred to me that I was turning to the left so much, that I might come back to the river again. It grew more dusky, and rained more violently; but there was nothing alarming in the situation, since I knew exactly where I

was. It was a little mortifying that I had miscalculated the distance : yet, so far was I from feeling any uneasiness about this, that I quickened my pace again, and, before I knew it, was in a full run ; that is, as full a run as a person can indulge in in the dusk, with so many trees in the way. No nervousness, but simply a reasonable desire to get there. I desired to look upon myself as the person “not lost, but gone before.” As time passed, and darkness fell, and no clearing or road appeared, I ran a little faster. It didn’t seem possible that the people had moved, or the road been changed ; and yet I was sure of my direction. I went on with an energy increased by the ridiculousness of the situation, the danger that an experienced woodsman was in of getting home late for supper ; the lateness of the meal being nothing to the gibes of the unlost. How long I kept this course, and how far I went on, I do not know ; but suddenly I stumbled against an ill-placed tree, and sat down on the soaked ground, a trifle out of breath. It then occurred to me that I had better verify my

course by the compass. There was scarcely light enough to distinguish the black end of the needle. To my amazement, the compass, which was made near Greenwich, was wrong. Allowing for the natural variation of the needle, it was absurdly wrong. It made out that I was going south when I was going north. It intimated, that, instead of turning to the left, I had been making a circuit to the right. According to the compass, the Lord only knew where I was.

The inclination of persons in the woods to travel in a circle is unexplained. I suppose it arises from the sympathy of the legs with the brain. Most people reason in a circle: their minds go round and round, always in the same track. For the last half-hour I had been saying over a sentence that started itself: "I wonder where that *road* is!" I had said it over till it had lost all meaning. I kept going round on it; and yet I could not believe that my body had been travelling in a circle. Not being able to recognize any tracks, I have no evidence that I had so travelled, except the general testimony of lost men.

The compass annoyed me. I've known experienced guides utterly discredit it. It couldn't be that I was to turn about, and go the way I had come. Nevertheless, I said to myself, "You'd better keep a cool head, my boy, or you are in for a night of it. Better listen to science than to spunk." And I resolved to heed the impartial needle. I was a little weary of the rough tramping: but it was necessary to be moving; for, with wet clothes and the night air, I was decidedly chilly. I turned towards the north, and slipped and stumbled along. A more uninviting forest to pass the night in I never saw. Every thing was soaked. If I became exhausted, it would be necessary to build a fire; and, as I walked on, I couldn't find a dry bit of wood. Even if a little punk were discovered in a rotten log, I had no hatchet to cut fuel. I thought it all over calmly. I had the usual three matches in my pocket. I knew exactly what would happen if I tried to build a fire. The first match would prove to be wet. The second match, when struck, would shine and smell, and fizz a little,

and then go out. There would be only one match left. Death would ensue if it failed. I should get close to the log, crawl under my hat, strike the match, see it catch, flicker, almost go out (the reader painfully excited by this time), blaze up, nearly expire, and finally fire the punk, — thank God! And I said to myself, “The public don’t want any more of this thing: it is played out. Either have a box of matches, or let the first one catch fire.”

In this gloomy mood I plunged along. The prospect was cheerless; for, apart from the comfort that a fire would give, it is necessary, at night, to keep off the wild beasts. I fancied I could hear the tread of the stealthy brutes following their prey. But there was one source of profound satisfaction, — the catamount had been killed. Mr. Colvin, the triangulating surveyor of the Adirondacks, killed him in his last official report to the State. Whether he despatched him with a theodolite or a barometer does not matter: he is officially dead, and none of the travellers can kill him any more. Yet he has served them a good turn.

I knew that catamount well. One night when we lay in the bogs of the South Beaver Meadow, under a canopy of mosquitoes, the serene midnight was parted by a wild and human-like cry from a neighboring mountain. "That's a cat," said the guide. I felt in a moment that it was the voice of "modern cultchah." "Modern culture," says Mr. Joseph Cook in a most impressive period, — "modern culture is a child crying in the wilderness, and with no voice but a cry." That describes the catamount exactly. The next day, when we ascended the mountain, we came upon the traces of this brute, — a spot where he had stood and cried in the night; and I confess that my hair rose with the consciousness of his recent presence, as it is said to do when a spirit passes by.

Whatever consolation the absence of catamount in a dark, drenched, and howling wilderness can impart, that I experienced; but I thought what a satire upon my present condition was modern culture, with its plain thinking and high living! It was impossible to get much sat-

isfaction out of the real and the ideal, — the me and the not-me. At this time what impressed me most was the absurdity of my position looked at in the light of modern civilization and all my advantages and acquirements. It seemed pitiful that society could do absolutely nothing for me. It was, in fact, humiliating to reflect that it would now be profitable to exchange all my possessions for the woods instinct of the most unlettered guide. I began to doubt the value of the “culture” that blunts the natural instincts.

It began to be a question whether I could hold out to walk all night ; for I must travel, or perish. And now I imagined that a spectre was walking by my side. This was Famine. To be sure, I had only recently eaten a hearty luncheon : but the pangs of hunger got hold on me when I thought that I should have no supper, no breakfast ; and, as the procession of unattainable meals stretched before me, I grew hungrier and hungrier. I could feel that I was becoming gaunt, and wasting away : already I seemed to be emaciated. It is astonishing how speedily a jocund,

well-conditioned human being can be transformed into a spectacle of poverty and want. Lose a man in the woods, drench him, tear his pantaloons, get his imagination running on his lost supper and the cheerful fireside that is expecting him, and he will become haggard in an hour. I am not dwelling upon these things to excite the reader's sympathy, but only to advise him, if he contemplates an adventure of this kind, to provide himself with matches, kindling-wood, something more to eat than one raw trout, and not to select a rainy night for it.

Nature is so pitiless, so unresponsive, to a person in trouble ! I had read of the soothing companionship of the forest, the pleasure of the pathless woods. But I thought, as I stumbled along in the dismal actuality, that, if I ever got out of it, I would write a letter to the newspapers, exposing the whole thing. There is an impassive, stolid brutality about the woods, that has never been enough insisted on. I tried to keep my mind fixed upon the fact of man's superiority to Nature ; his ability to dominate and

outwit her. My situation was an amusing satire on this theory. I fancied that I could feel a sneer in the woods at my detected conceit. There was something personal in it. The downpour of the rain and the slipperiness of the ground were elements of discomfort; but there was, besides these, a kind of terror in the very character of the forest itself. I think this arose not more from its immensity than from the kind of stolidity to which I have alluded. It seemed to me that it would be a sort of relief to kick the trees. I don't wonder that the bears fall to, occasionally, and scratch the bark off the great pines and maples, tearing it angrily away. One must have some vent to his feelings. It is a common experience of people lost in the woods to lose their heads; and even the woodsmen themselves are not free from this panic when some accident has thrown them out of their reckoning. Fright unsettles the judgment: the oppressive silence of the woods is a vacuum in which the mind goes astray. It's a hollow sham, this pantheism, I said; being "one with Nature" is all humbug:

I should like to see somebody. Man, to be sure, is of very little account, and soon gets beyond his depth; but the society of the least human being is better than this gigantic indifference. The "rapture on the lonely shore" is agreeable only when you know you can at any moment go home.

I had now given up all expectation of finding the road, and was steering my way as well as I could northward towards the valley. In my haste I made slow progress. Probably the distance I travelled was short, and the time consumed not long; but I seemed to be adding mile to mile, and hour to hour. I had time to review the incidents of the Russo-Turkish war, and to forecast the entire Eastern question; I outlined the characters of all my companions left in camp, and sketched in a sort of comedy the sympathetic and disparaging observations they would make on my adventure; I repeated something like a thousand times, without contradiction, "What a fool you were to leave the river!" I stopped twenty times, thinking I heard its loud roar, always deceived by the wind in the tree-tops; I began to enter-

tain serious doubts about the compass,—when suddenly I became aware that I was no longer on level ground: I was descending a slope; I was actually in a ravine. In a moment more I was in a brook newly formed by the rain. “Thank Heaven!” I cried: “this I shall follow, whatever conscience or the compass says.” In this region, all streams go, sooner or later, into the valley. This ravine, this stream, no doubt, led to the river. I splashed and tumbled along down it in mud and water. Down hill we went together, the fall showing that I must have wandered to high ground. When I guessed that I must be close to the river, I suddenly stepped into mud up to my ankles. It was the road,—running, of course, the wrong way, but still the blessed road. It was a mere canal of liquid mud; but man had made it, and it would take me home. I was at least three miles from the point I supposed I was near at sunset, and I had before me a toilsome walk of six or seven miles, most of the way in a ditch; but it is truth to say that I enjoyed every step of it. I was safe; I knew where I was; and

I could have walked till morning. The mind had again got the upper hand of the body, and began to plume itself on its superiority: it was even disposed to doubt whether it had been "lost" at all.





III.

A FIGHT WITH A TROUT.



TROUT-FISHING in the Adirondacks would be a more attractive pastime than it is, but for the popular notion of its danger. The trout is a retiring and harmless animal, except when he is aroused, and forced into a combat; and then his agility, fierceness, and vindictiveness become apparent. No one who has studied the excellent pictures representing men in an open boat, exposed to the assaults of long, enraged trout flying at them through the open air with open mouth, ever ventures with his rod upon the lonely lakes of the forest without a certain terror, or ever reads of the exploits of daring fishermen without a feeling of admiration for their heroism. Most of their adventures are

thrilling, and all of them are, in narration, more or less unjust to the trout: in fact, the object of them seems to be to exhibit, at the expense of the trout, the shrewdness, the skill, and the muscular power of the sportsman. My own simple story has few of these recommendations.

We had built our bark camp one summer, and were staying on one of the popular lakes of the Saranac region. It would be a very pretty region if it were not so flat, if the margins of the lakes had not been flooded by dams at the outlets, — which have killed the trees, and left a rim of ghastly dead-wood like the swamps of the under-world pictured by Doré's bizarre pencil, — and if the pianos at the hotels were in tune. It would be an excellent sporting-region also (for there is water enough) if the fish commissioners would stock the waters, and if previous hunters had not pulled all the hair and skin off from the deer's tails. Formerly sportsmen had a habit of catching the deer by the tails, and of being dragged in mere wantonness round and round the shores. It is well known, that, if you seize

a deer by this "holt," the skin will slip off like the peel from a banana. This reprehensible practice was carried so far, that the traveller is now hourly pained by the sight of peeled-tail deer mournfully sneaking about the wood.

We had been hearing, for weeks, of a small lake in the heart of the virgin forest, some ten miles from our camp, which was alive with trout, unsophisticated, hungry trout: the inlet to it was described as *stiff* with them. In my imagination I saw them lying there in ranks and rows, each a foot long, three tiers deep, a solid mass. The lake had never been visited, except by stray sable-hunters in the winter, and was known as the Unknown Pond. I determined to explore it; fully expecting, however, that it would prove to be a delusion, as such mysterious haunts of the trout usually are. Confiding my purpose to Luke, we secretly made our preparations, and stole away from the shanty one morning at day-break. Each of us carried a boat, a pair of blankets, a sack of bread, pork, and maple-sugar; while I had my case of rods, creel, and

book of flies, and Luke had an axe and the kitchen utensils. We think nothing of loads of this sort in the woods.

Five miles through a tamarack-swamp brought us to the inlet of Unknown Pond, upon which we embarked our fleet, and paddled down its vagrant waters. They were at first sluggish, winding among *triste* fir-trees, but gradually developed a strong current. At the end of three miles a loud roar ahead warned us that we were approaching rapids, falls, and cascades. We paused. The danger was unknown. We had our choice of shouldering our loads and making a *détour* through the woods, or of "shooting the rapids." Naturally we chose the more dangerous course. Shooting the rapids has often been described, and I will not repeat the description here. It is needless to say that I drove my frail bark through the boiling rapids, over the successive water-falls, amid rocks and vicious eddies, and landed, half a mile below, with whitened hair and a boat half full of water; and that the guide was upset, and boat, contents, and man were strewn along the shore.

After this common experience we went quickly on our journey, and, a couple of hours before sundown, reached the lake. If I live to my dying-day, I never shall forget its appearance. The lake is almost an exact circle, about a quarter of a mile in diameter. The forest about it was untouched by axe, and unkilld by artificial flooding. The azure water had a perfect setting of evergreens, in which all the shades of the fir, the balsam, the pine, and the spruce, were perfectly blended; and at intervals on the shore in the emerald rim blazed the ruby of the cardinal-flower. It was at once evident that the unruffled waters had never been vexed by the keel of a boat. But what chiefly attracted my attention, and amused me, was the boiling of the water, the bubbling and breaking, as if the lake were a vast kettle, with a fire underneath. A tyro would have been astonished at this common phenomenon; but sportsmen will at once understand me when I say that the water *boiled* with the breaking trout. I studied the surface for some time to see upon what sort of flies

they were feeding, in order to suit my cast to their appetites; but they seemed to be at play rather than feeding, leaping high in the air in graceful curves, and tumbling about each other as we see them in the Adirondack pictures.

It is well known that no person who regards his reputation will ever kill a trout with any thing but a fly. It requires some training on the part of the trout to take to this method. The uncultivated, unsophisticated trout in unfrequented waters prefers the bait; and the rural people, whose sole object in going a-fishing appears to be to catch fish, indulge them in their primitive taste for the worm. No sportsman, however, will use any thing but a fly, except he happens to be alone.

While Luke launched my boat, and arranged his seat in the stern, I prepared my rod and line. The rod is a bamboo, weighing seven ounces, which has to be spliced with a winding of silk thread every time it is used. This is a tedious process; but, by fastening the joints in this way, a uniform spring is secured in the rod.

No one devoted to high art would think of using a socket joint. My line was forty yards of untwisted silk upon a multiplying reel. The "leader" (I am very particular about my leaders) had been made to order from a domestic animal with which I had been acquainted. The fisherman requires as good a catgut as the violinist. The interior of the house-cat, it is well known, is exceedingly sensitive; but it may not be so well known that the reason why some cats leave the room in distress when a piano-forte is played is because the two instruments are not in the same key, and the vibrations of the chords of the one are in discord with the catgut of the other. On six feet of this superior article I fixed three artificial flies,—a simple brown hackle, a gray body with scarlet wings, and one of my own invention, which I thought would be new to the most experienced fly-catcher. The trout-fly does not resemble any known species of insect. It is a "conventionalized" creation, as we say of ornamentation. The theory is, that, fly-fishing being a high art, the fly must not be a tame

imitation of nature, but an artistic suggestion of it. It requires an artist to construct one; and not every bungler can take a bit of red flannel, a peacock's feather, a flash of tinsel thread, a cock's plume, a section of a hen's wing, and fabricate a tiny object that will not look like any fly, but still will suggest the universal conventional fly.

I took my stand in the centre of the tipsy boat; and Luke shoved off, and slowly paddled towards some lily-pads, while I began casting, unlimbering my tools, as it were. The fish had all disappeared. I got out, perhaps, fifty feet of line, with no response, and gradually increased it to one hundred. It is not difficult to learn to cast; but it is difficult to learn not to snap off the flies at every throw. Of this, however, we will not speak. I continued casting for some moments, until I became satisfied that there had been a miscalculation. Either the trout were too green to know what I was at, or they were dissatisfied with my offers. I reeled in, and changed the flies (that is, the fly that was

not snapped off). After studying the color of the sky, of the water, and of the foliage, and the moderated light of the afternoon, I put on a series of beguilers, all of a subdued brilliancy, in harmony with the approach of evening. At the second cast, which was a short one, I saw a splash where the leader fell, and gave an excited jerk. The next instant I perceived the game, and did not need the unfeigned "dam" of Luke to convince me that I had snatched his felt hat from his head, and deposited it among the lilies. Discouraged by this, we whirled about, and paddled over to the inlet, where a little ripple was visible in the tinted light. At the very first cast I saw that the hour had come. Three trout leaped into the air. The danger of this manœuvre all fishermen understand. It is one of the commonest in the woods: three heavy trout taking hold at once, rushing in different directions, smash the tackle into flinders. I evaded this catch, and threw again. I recall the moment. A hermit thrush, on the tip of a balsam, uttered his long, liquid, evening note. Happen-

ing to look over my shoulder, I saw the peak of Marcy gleam rosy in the sky (I can't help it that Marcy is fifty miles off, and cannot be seen from this region: these incidental touches are always used). The hundred feet of silk swished through the air, and the tail-fly fell as lightly on the water as a three-cent-piece (which no slamming will give the weight of a ten) drops upon the contribution-plate. Instantly there was a rush, a swirl. I struck, and "Got him, by—!" Never mind what Luke said I got him by. "Out on a fly!" continued that irreverent guide; but I told him to back water, and make for the centre of the lake. The trout, as soon as he felt the prick of the hook, was off like a shot, and took out the whole of the line with a rapidity that made it smoke. "Give him the butt!" shouted Luke. It is the usual remark in such an emergency. I gave him the butt; and, recognizing the fact and my spirit, the trout at once sank to the bottom, and sulked. It is the most dangerous mood of a trout; for you cannot tell what he will do next. We reeled up a little, and waited five minutes for

him to reflect. A tightening of the line enraged him, and he soon developed his tactics. Coming to the surface, he made straight for the boat faster than I could reel in, and evidently with hostile intentions. "Look out for him!" cried Luke as he came flying in the air. I evaded him by dropping flat in the bottom of the boat; and, when I picked my traps up, he was spinning across the lake as if he had a new idea: but the line was still fast. He did not run far. I gave him the butt again; a thing he seemed to hate, even as a gift. In a moment the evil-minded fish, lashing the water in his rage, was coming back again, making straight for the boat as before. Luke, who was used to these encounters, having read of them in the writings of travellers he had accompanied, raised his paddle in self-defence. The trout left the water about ten feet from the boat, and came directly at me with fiery eyes, his speckled sides flashing like a meteor. I dodged as he whisked by with a vicious slap of his bifurcated tail, and nearly upset the boat. The line was of course slack;

and the danger was that he would entangle it about me, and carry away a leg. This was evidently his game; but I untangled it, and only lost a breast-button or two by the swiftly-moving string. The trout plunged into the water with a hissing sound, and went away again with all the line on the reel. More butt; more indignation on the part of the captive. The contest had now been going on for half an hour, and I was getting exhausted. We had been back and forth across the lake, and round and round the lake. What I feared was, that the trout would start up the inlet, and wreck us in the bushes. But he had a new fancy, and began the execution of a manœuvre which I had never read of. Instead of coming straight towards me, he took a large circle, swimming rapidly, and *gradually contracting his orbit*. I reeled in, and kept my eye on him. Round and round he went, narrowing his circle. I began to suspect the game; which was, to twist my head off. When he had reduced the radius of his circle to about twenty-five feet, he struck a tremendous pace through the water. It

would be false modesty in a sportsman to say that I was not equal to the occasion. Instead of turning round with him, as he expected, I stepped to the bow, braced myself, and let the boat swing. Round went the fish, and round we went like a top. I saw a line of Mount Marceys all round the horizon; the rosy tint in the west made a broad band of pink along the sky above the tree-tops; the evening star was a perfect circle of light, a hoop of gold in the heavens. We whirled and reeled, and reeled and whirled. I was willing to give the malicious beast butt and line, and all, if he would only go the other way for a change.

When I came to myself, Luke was gaffing the trout at the boat-side. After we had got him in, and dressed him, he weighed three-quarters of a pound. Fish always lose by being "got in and dressed." It is best to weigh them while they are in the water. The only really large one I ever caught got away with my leader when I first struck him. He weighed ten pounds.



IV.

A-HUNTING OF THE DEER.

IF civilization owes a debt of gratitude to the self-sacrificing sportsmen who have cleared the Adirondack regions of catamounts and savage trout, what shall be said of the army which has so nobly relieved them of the terror of the deer? The deer-slayers have somewhat celebrated their exploits in print; but I think that justice has never been done them.

The American deer in the wilderness, left to himself, leads a comparatively harmless but rather stupid life, with only such excitement as his own timid fancy raises. It was very seldom that one of his tribe was eaten by the North-American tiger. For a wild animal he is very domestic, simple in his tastes, regular in his

habits, affectionate in his family. Unfortunately for his repose, his haunch is as tender as his heart. Of all wild creatures he is one of the most graceful in action, and he poses with the skill of an experienced model. I have seen the goats on Mount Pentelicus scatter at the approach of a stranger, climb to the sharp points of projecting rocks, and attitudinize in the most self-conscious manner, striking at once those picturesque postures against the sky with which Oriental pictures have made us and them familiar. But the whole proceeding was theatrical. Greece is the home of art, and it is rare to find any thing there natural and unstudied. I presume that these goats have no nonsense about them when they are alone with the goat-herds, any more than the goat-herds have, except when they come to pose in the studio; but the long ages of culture, the presence always to the eye of the best models and the forms of immortal beauty, the heroic friezes of the Temple of Theseus, the marble processions of sacrificial animals, have had a steady moulding, educating influence equal to a society

of decorative art upon the people and the animals who have dwelt in this artistic atmosphere. The Attic goat has become an artificially artistic being; though of course he is not now what he was, as a poser, in the days of Polycleetus. There is opportunity for a very instructive essay by Mr. E. A. Freeman on the decadence of the Attic goat under the influence of the Ottoman Turk.

The American deer, in the free atmosphere of our country, and as yet untouched by our decorative art, is without self-consciousness, and all his attitudes are free and unstudied. The favorite position of the deer—his fore-feet in the shallow margin of the lake, among the lily-pads, his antlers thrown back and his nose in the air at the moment he hears the stealthy breaking of a twig in the forest—is still spirited and graceful, and wholly unaffected by the pictures of him which the artists have put upon canvas.

Wherever you go in the Northern forest, you will find deer-paths. So plainly marked and well-trodden are they, that it is easy to mistake them for trails made by hunters; but he who

follows one of them is soon in difficulties. He may find himself climbing through cedar-thickets an almost inaccessible cliff, or immersed in the intricacies of a marsh. The "run," in one direction, will lead to water; but, in the other, it climbs the highest hills, to which the deer retires, for safety and repose, in impenetrable thickets. The hunters, in winter, find them congregated in "yards," where they can be surrounded and shot as easily as our troops shoot Comanche women and children in their winter villages. These little paths are full of pit-falls among the roots and stones; and, nimble as the deer is, he sometimes breaks one of his slender legs in them. Yet he knows how to treat himself without a surgeon. I knew of a tame deer in a settlement in the edge of the forest who had the misfortune to break her leg. She immediately disappeared with a delicacy rare in an invalid, and was not seen for two weeks. Her friends had given her up, supposing that she had dragged herself away into the depths of the woods, and died of starvation; when one day she returned, cured of

lameness, but thin as a virgin shadow. She had the sense to shun the doctor ; to lie down in some safe place, and patiently wait for her leg to heal. I have observed in many of the more refined animals this sort of shyness, and reluctance to give trouble, which excite our admiration when noticed in mankind.

The deer is called a timid animal, and taunted with possessing courage only when he is "at bay ;" the stag will fight when he can no longer flee ; and the doe will defend her young in the face of murderous enemies. The deer gets little credit for this eleventh-hour bravery. But I think, that, in any truly Christian condition of society, the deer would not be conspicuous for cowardice. I suppose that if the American girl, even as she is described in foreign romances, were pursued by bull-dogs, and fired at from behind fences every time she ventured outdoors, she would become timid, and reluctant to go abroad. When that golden era comes which the poets think is behind us, and the prophets declare is about to be ushered in by the opening of

the "vials," and the killing of everybody who does not believe as those nations believe which have the most cannon; when we all live in real concord, — perhaps the gentle-hearted deer will be respected, and will find that men are not more savage to the weak than are the cougars and panthers. If the little spotted fawn can think, it must seem to her a queer world in which the advent of innocence is hailed by the baying of fierce hounds and the "ping" of the rifle.

Hunting the deer in the Adirondacks is conducted in the most manly fashion. There are several methods, and in none of them is a fair chance to the deer considered. A favorite method with the natives is practised in winter, and is called by them "still hunting." My idea of still hunting is for one man to go alone into the forest, look about for a deer, put his wits fairly against the wits of the keen-scented animal, and kill his deer, or get lost in the attempt. There seems to be a sort of fairness about this. It is private assassination, tempered with a little uncertainty about finding your man. The still hunt-

ing of the natives has all the romance and danger attending the slaughter of sheep in an *abattoir*. As the snow gets deep, many deer congregate in the depths of the forest, and keep a place trodden down, which grows larger as they tramp down the snow in search of food. In time this refuge becomes a sort of "yard," surrounded by unbroken snow-banks. The hunters then make their way to this retreat on snow-shoes, and from the top of the banks pick off the deer at leisure with their rifles, and haul them away to market, until the enclosure is pretty much emptied. This is one of the surest methods of exterminating the deer; it is also one of the most merciful; and, being the plan adopted by our government for civilizing the Indian, it ought to be popular. The only people who object to it are the summer sportsmen. They naturally want some pleasure out of the death of the deer.

Some of our best sportsmen, who desire to protract the pleasure of slaying deer through as many seasons as possible, object to the practice of the hunters, who make it their chief business

to slaughter as many deer in a camping-season as they can. Their own rule, they say, is to kill a deer only when they need venison to eat. Their excuse is specious. What right have these sophists to put themselves into a desert place, out of the reach of provisions, and then ground a right to slay deer on their own improvidence? If it is necessary for these people to have any thing to eat, which I doubt, it is not necessary that they should have the luxury of venison.

One of the most picturesque methods of hunting the poor deer is called "floating." The person, with murder in his heart, chooses a cloudy night, seats himself, rifle in hand, in a canoe, which is noiselessly paddled by the guide, and explores the shore of the lake or the dark inlet. In the bow of the boat is a light in a "jack," the rays of which are shielded from the boat and its occupants. A deer comes down to feed upon the lily-pads. The boat approaches him. He looks up, and stands a moment, terrified or fascinated by the bright flames. In that moment the sportsman is supposed to shoot the

deer. As an historical fact, his hand usually shakes, so that he misses the animal, or only wounds him; and the stag limps away to die after days of suffering. Usually, however, the hunters remain out all night, get stiff from cold and the cramped position in the boat, and, when they return in the morning to camp, cloud their future existence by the assertion that they "heard a big buck" moving along the shore, but the people in camp made so much noise that he was frightened off.

By all odds, the favorite and prevalent mode is hunting with dogs. The dogs do the hunting, the men the killing. The hounds are sent into the forest to rouse the deer, and drive him from his cover. They climb the mountains, strike the trails, and go baying and yelping on the track of the poor beast. The deer have their established run-ways, as I said; and, when they are disturbed in their retreat, they are certain to attempt to escape by following one which invariably leads to some lake or stream. All that the hunter has to do is to seat himself by one of

these run-ways, or sit in a boat on the lake, and wait the coming of the pursued deer. The frightened beast, fleeing from the unreasoning brutality of the hounds, will often seek the open country, with a mistaken confidence in the humanity of man. To kill a deer when he suddenly passes one on a run-way demands presence of mind, and quickness of aim: to shoot him from the boat, after he has plunged panting into the lake, requires the rare ability to hit a moving object the size of a deer's head a few rods distant. Either exploit is sufficient to make a hero of a common man. To paddle up to the swimming deer, and cut his throat, is a sure means of getting venison, and has its charms for some. Even women, and doctors of divinity, have enjoyed this exquisite pleasure. It cannot be denied that we are so constituted by a wise Creator as to feel a delight in killing a wild animal which we do not experience in killing a tame one.

The pleasurable excitement of a deer-hunt has never, I believe, been regarded from the deer's point of view. I happen to be in a position,

by reason of a lucky Adirondack experience, to present it in that light. I am sorry if this introduction to my little story has seemed long to the reader: it is too late now to skip it; but he can *recoup* himself by omitting the story.

Early on the morning of the 23d of August, 1877, a doe was feeding on Basin Mountain. The night had been warm and showery, and the morning opened in an undecided way. The wind was southerly: it is what the deer call a dog-wind, having come to know quite well the meaning of "a southerly wind and a cloudy sky." The sole companion of the doe was her only child, a charming little fawn, whose brown coat was just beginning to be mottled with the beautiful spots which make this young creature as lovely as the gazelle. The buck, its father, had been that night on a long tramp across the mountain to Clear Pond, and had not yet returned: he went ostensibly to feed on the succulent lily-pads there. "He feedeth among the lilies until the day break and the shadows flee away, and he should be here by this hour; but

he cometh not," she said, "leaping upon the mountains, skipping upon the hills." Clear Pond was too far off for the young mother to go with her fawn for a night's pleasure. It was a fashionable watering-place at this season among the deer; and the doe may have remembered, not without uneasiness, the moonlight meetings of a frivolous society there. But the buck did not come: he was very likely sleeping under one of the ledges on Tight Nippin. Was he alone? "I charge you, by the roes and by the hinds of the field, that ye stir not nor awake my love till he please."

The doe was feeding, daintily cropping the tender leaves of the young shoots, and turning from time to time to regard her offspring. The fawn had taken his morning meal, and now lay curled up on a bed of moss, watching contentedly, with his large, soft brown eyes, every movement of his mother. The great eyes followed her with an alert entreaty; and, if the mother stepped a pace or two farther away in feeding, the fawn made a half-movement, as if to rise and

follow her. You see, she was his sole dependence in all the world. But he was quickly reassured when she turned her gaze on him; and if, in alarm, he uttered a plaintive cry, she bounded to him at once, and, with every demonstration of affection, licked his mottled skin till it shone again.

It was a pretty picture, — maternal love on the one part, and happy trust on the other. The doe was a beauty, and would have been so considered anywhere, as graceful and winning a creature as the sun that day shone on, — slender limbs, not too heavy flanks, round body, and aristocratic head, with small ears, and luminous, intelligent, affectionate eyes. How alert, supple, free, she was! What untaught grace in every movement! What a charming pose when she lifted her head, and turned it to regard her child! You would have had a companion-picture, if you had seen, as I saw that morning, a baby kicking about among the dry pine-needles on a ledge above the Ausable, in the valley below, while its young mother sat near, with an easel before her,

touching in the color of a reluctant landscape, giving a quick look at the sky and the outline of the Twin Mountains, and bestowing every third glance upon the laughing boy, — art in its infancy.

The doe lifted her head a little with a quick motion, and turned her ear to the south. Had she heard something? Probably it was only the south wind in the balsams. There was silence all about in the forest. If the doe had heard any thing, it was one of the distant noises of the world. There are in the woods occasional moanings, premonitions of change, which are inaudible to the dull ears of men, but which, I have no doubt, the forest-folk hear and understand. If the doe's suspicions were excited for an instant, they were gone as soon. With an affectionate glance at her fawn, she continued picking up her breakfast.

But suddenly she started, head erect, eyes dilated, a tremor in her limbs. She took a step; she turned her head to the south; she listened intently. There was a sound, — a distant, pro-

longed note, bell-toned, pervading the woods, shaking the air in smooth vibrations. It was repeated. The doe had no doubt now. She shook like the sensitive mimosa when a footstep approaches. It was the baying of a hound ! It was far off, — at the foot of the mountain. Time enough to fly ; time enough to put miles between her and the hound, before he should come upon her fresh trail ; time enough to escape away through the dense forest, and hide in the recesses of Panther Gorge ; yes, time enough. But there was the fawn. The cry of the hound was repeated, more distinct this time. The mother instinctively bounded away a few paces. The fawn started up with an anxious bleat : the doe turned ; she came back ; she couldn't leave it. She bent over it, and licked it, and seemed to say, " Come, my child : we are pursued : we must go." She walked away towards the west, and the little thing skipped after her. It was slow going for the slender legs, over the fallen logs, and through the rasping bushes. The doe bounded in advance, and waited : the fawn scrambled after her,

slipping and tumbling along, very groggy yet on its legs, and whining a good deal because its mother kept always moving away from it. The fawn evidently did not hear the hound: the little innocent would even have looked sweetly at the dog, and tried to make friends with it, if the brute had been rushing upon him. By all the means at her command the doe urged her young one on; but it was slow work. She might have been a mile away while they were making a few rods. Whenever the fawn caught up, he was quite content to frisk about. He wanted more breakfast, for one thing; and his mother wouldn't stand still. She moved on continually; and his weak legs were tangled in the roots of the narrow deer-path.

Shortly came a sound that threw the doe into a panic of terror, — a short, sharp yelp, followed by a prolonged howl, caught up and re-echoed by other bayings along the mountain-side. The doe knew what that meant. One hound had caught her trail, and the whole pack responded to the “view-halloo.” The danger was certain now:

it was near. She could not crawl on in this way: the dogs would soon be upon them. She turned again for flight: the fawn, scrambling after her, tumbled over, and bleated piteously. The baying, emphasized now by the yelp of certainty, came nearer. Flight with the fawn was impossible. The doe returned and stood by it, head erect, and nostrils distended. She stood perfectly still, but trembling. Perhaps she was thinking. The fawn took advantage of the situation, and began to draw his luncheon ration. The doe seemed to have made up her mind. She let him finish. The fawn, having taken all he wanted, lay down contentedly, and the doe licked him for a moment. Then, with the swiftness of a bird, she dashed away, and in a moment was lost in the forest. She went in the direction of the hounds.

According to all human calculations, she was going into the jaws of death. So she was: all human calculations are selfish. She kept straight on, hearing the baying every moment more distinctly. She descended the slope of the moun-

tain until she reached the more open forest of hard-wood. It was freer going here, and the cry of the pack echoed more resoundingly in the great spaces. She was going due east, when (judging by the sound, the hounds were not far off, though they were still hidden by a ridge) she turned short away to the north, and kept on at a good pace. In five minutes more she heard the sharp, exultant yelp of discovery, and then the deep-mouthed howl of pursuit. The hounds had struck her trail where she turned, and the fawn was safe.

The doe was in good running condition, the ground was not bad, and she felt the exhilaration of the chase. For the moment, fear left her, and she bounded on with the exaltation of triumph. For a quarter of an hour she went on at a slapping pace, clearing the moose-bushes with bound after bound, flying over the fallen logs, pausing neither for brook nor ravine. The baying of the hounds grew fainter behind her. But she struck a bad piece of going, a dead-wood slash. It was marvellous to see her skim over it, leaping among

its intricacies, and not breaking her slender legs. No other living animal could do it. But it was killing work. She began to pant fearfully; she lost ground. The baying of the hounds was nearer. She climbed the hard-wood hill at a slower gait; but, once on more level, free ground, her breath came back to her, and she stretched away with new courage, and maybe a sort of contempt of her heavy pursuers.

After running at high speed perhaps half a mile farther, it occurred to her that it would be safe now to turn to the west, and, by a wide circuit, seek her fawn. But, at the moment, she heard a sound that chilled her heart. It was the cry of a hound to the west of her. The crafty brute had made the circuit of the slash, and cut off her retreat. There was nothing to do but to keep on; and on she went, still to the north, with the noise of the pack behind her. In five minutes more she had passed into a hillside clearing. Cows and young steers were grazing there. She heard a tinkle of bells. Below her, down the mountain-slope, were other clearings, broken by

patches of woods. Fences intervened ; and a mile or two down lay the valley, the shining Ausable, and the peaceful farm-houses. That way also her hereditary enemies were. Not a merciful heart in all that lovely valley. She hesitated : it was only for an instant. She must cross the Slidebrook Valley if possible, and gain the mountain opposite. She bounded on ; she stopped. What was that ? From the valley ahead came the cry of a searching hound. All the devils were loose this morning. Every way was closed but one, and that led straight down the mountain to the cluster of houses. Conspicuous among them was a slender white wooden spire. The doe did not know that it was the spire of a Christian chapel. But perhaps she thought that human pity dwelt there, and would be more merciful than the teeth of the hounds.

“ The hounds are baying on my track :

O white man ! will you send me back ? ”

In a panic, frightened animals will always flee to human-kind from the danger of more savage

focs. They always make a mistake in doing so. Perhaps the trait is the survival of an era of peace on earth; perhaps it is a prophecy of the golden age of the future. The business of this age is murder,—the slaughter of animals, the slaughter of fellow-men, by the wholesale. Hilarious poets who have never fired a gun write hunting-songs, — *Ti-ra-la*: and good bishops write war-songs, — *Ave the Czar*!

The hunted doe went down the “open,” clearing the fences splendidly, flying along the stony path. It was a beautiful sight. But consider what a shot it was! If the deer, now, could only have been caught! No doubt there were tender-hearted people in the valley who would have spared her life, shut her up in a stable, and petted her. Was there one who would have let her go back to her waiting fawn? It is the business of civilization to tame or kill.

The doe went on. She left the saw-mill on John's Brook to her right; she turned into a wood-path. As she approached Slide Brook, she saw a boy standing by a tree with a raised rifle.

The dogs were not in sight ; but she could hear them coming down the hill. There was no time for hesitation. With a tremendous burst of speed she cleared the stream, and, as she touched the bank, heard the “ ping ” of a rifle-bullet in the air above her. The cruel sound gave wings to the poor thing. In a moment more she was in the opening : she leaped into the travelled road. Which way ? Below her in the wood was a load of hay : a man and a boy, with pitchforks in their hands, were running towards her. She turned south, and flew along the street. The town was up. Women and children ran to the doors and windows ; men snatched their rifles ; shots were fired ; at the big boarding-houses, the summer boarders, who never have any thing to do, came out and cheered ; a camp-stool was thrown from a veranda. Some young fellows shooting at a mark in the meadow saw the flying deer, and popped away at her ; but they were accustomed to a mark that stood still. It was all so sudden ! There were twenty people who were just going to shoot her ; when the doe leaped the road

fence, and went away across a marsh toward the foot-hills. It was a fearful gantlet to run. But nobody except the deer considered it in that light. Everybody told what he was just going to do; everybody who had seen the performance was a kind of hero, — everybody except the deer. For days and days it was the subject of conversation; and the summer boarders kept their guns at hand, expecting another deer would come to be shot at.

The doe went away to the foot-hills, going now slower, and evidently fatigued, if not frightened half to death. Nothing is so appalling to a recluse as half a mile of summer boarders. As the deer entered the thin woods, she saw a rabble of people start across the meadow in pursuit. By this time, the dogs, panting, and lolling out their tongues, came swinging along, keeping the trail, like stupids, and consequently losing ground when the deer doubled. But, when the doe had got into the timber, she heard the savage brutes howling across the meadow. (It is well enough, perhaps, to say that nobody offered to shoot the dogs.)

The courage of the panting fugitive was not gone: she was game to the tip of her high-bred ears. But the fearful pace at which she had just been going told on her. Her legs trembled, and her heart beat like a trip-hammer. She slowed her speed perforce, but still fled industriously up the right bank of the stream. When she had gone a couple of miles, and the dogs were evidently gaining again, she crossed the broad, deep brook, climbed the steep left bank, and fled on in the direction of the Mount-Marcy trail. The fording of the river threw the hounds off for a time. She knew, by their uncertain yelping up and down the opposite bank, that she had a little respite: she used it, however, to push on until the baying was faint in her ears; and then she dropped, exhausted, upon the ground.

This rest, brief as it was, saved her life. Roused again by the baying pack, she leaped forward with better speed, though without that keen feeling of exhilarating flight that she had in the morning. It was still a race for life; but the odds were in her favor, she thought. She did not ap-

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preciate the dogged persistence of the hounds, nor had any inspiration told her that the race is not to the swift. She was a little confused in her mind where to go; but an instinct kept her course to the left, and consequently farther away from her fawn. Going now slower, and now faster, as the pursuit seemed more distant or nearer, she kept to the south-west, crossed the stream again, left Panther Gorge on her right, and ran on by Haystack and Skylight in the direction of the Upper Ausable Pond. I do not know her exact course through this maze of mountains, swamps, ravines, and frightful wildernesses. I only know that the poor thing worked her way along painfully, with sinking heart and unsteady limbs, lying down "dead beat" at intervals, and then spurred on by the cry of the remorseless dogs, until, late in the afternoon, she staggered down the shoulder of Bartlett, and stood upon the shore of the lake. If she could put that piece of water between her and her pursuers, she would be safe. Had she strength to swim it?

At her first step into the water she saw a sight

that sent her back with a bound. There was a boat mid-lake: two men were in it. One was rowing: the other had a gun in his hand. They were looking towards her: they had seen her. (She did not know that they had heard the bay-ing of hounds on the mountains, and had been lying in wait for her an hour.) What should she do? The hounds were drawing near. No escape that way, even if she could still run. With only a moment's hesitation she plunged into the lake, and struck obliquely across. Her tired legs could not propel the tired body rapidly. She saw the boat headed for her. She turned toward the centre of the lake. The boat turned. She could hear the rattle of the oar-locks. It was gaining on her. Then there was a silence. Then there was a splash of the water just ahead of her, followed by a roar round the lake, the words "Confound it all!" and a rattle of the oars again. The doe saw the boat nearing her. She turned irresolutely to the shore whence she came: the dogs were lapping the water, and howling there. She turned again to the centre of the lake.

The brave, pretty creature was quite exhausted now. In a moment more, with a rush of water, the boat was on her, and the man at the oars had leaned over and caught her by the tail.

“Knock her on the head with that paddle!” he shouted to the gentleman in the stern.

The gentleman *was* a gentleman, with a kind, smooth-shaven face, and might have been a minister of some sort of everlasting gospel. He took the paddle in his hand. Just then the doe turned her head, and looked at him with her great, appealing eyes.

“I can’t do it! my soul, I can’t do it!” and he dropped the paddle. “Oh, let her go!”

“Let H. go!” was the only response of the guide as he slung the deer round, whipped out his hunting-knife, and made a pass that severed her jugular.

And the gentleman ate that night of the venison.

The buck returned about the middle of the afternoon. The fawn was bleating piteously,

hungry and lonesome. The buck was surprised. He looked about in the forest. He took a circuit, and came back. His doe was nowhere to be seen. He looked down at the fawn in a helpless sort of way. The fawn appealed for his supper. The buck had nothing whatever to give his child, — nothing but his sympathy. If he said any thing, this is what he said : “ I’m the head of this family ; but, really, this is a novel case. I’ve nothing whatever for you. I don’t know what to do. I’ve the feelings of a father ; but you can’t live on *them*. Let us travel.”

The buck walked away : the little one toddled after him. They disappeared in the forest.





V.

A CHARACTER STUDY.

THERE has been a lively inquiry after the primeval man. Wanted, a man who would satisfy the conditions of the miocene environment, and yet would be good enough for an ancestor. We are not particular about our ancestors, if they are sufficiently remote ; but we must have something. Failing to apprehend the primeval man, science has sought the primitive man where he exists as a survival in present savage races. He is, at best, only a mushroom growth of the recent period (came in, probably, with the general raft of mammalian fauna) ; but he possesses yet some rudimentary traits that may be studied.

It is a good mental exercise to try to fix the

mind on the primitive man divested of all the attributes he has acquired in his struggles with the other mammalian fauna. Fix the mind on an orange, the ordinary occupation of the metaphysician: take from it (without eating it) odor, color, weight, form, substance, and peel; then let the mind still dwell on it as an orange. The experiment is perfectly successful; only, at the end of it, you haven't any mind. Better still, consider the telephone: take away from it the metallic disk, and the magnetized iron, and the connecting wire, and then let the mind run abroad on the telephone. The mind won't come back. I have tried by this sort of process to get a conception of the primitive man. I let the mind roam away back over the vast geologic spaces, and sometimes fancy I see a dim image of him stalking across the terrace epoch of the quaternary period.

But this is an unsatisfying pleasure. The best results are obtained by studying the primitive man as he is left here and there in our era, a witness of what has been; and I find him most

to my mind in the Adirondack system of what geologists call the Champlain epoch. I suppose the primitive man is one who owes more to nature than to the forces of civilization. What we seek in him are the primal and original traits, unmixed with the sophistications of society, and unimpaired by the refinements of an artificial culture. He would retain the primitive instincts, which are cultivated out of the ordinary, commonplace man. I should expect to find him, by reason of an unrelinquished kinship, enjoying a special communion with nature,—admitted to its mysteries, understanding its moods, and able to predict its vagaries. He would be a kind of test to us of what we have lost by our gregarious acquisitions. On the one hand, there would be the sharpness of the senses, the keen instincts (which the fox and the beaver still possess), the ability to find one's way in the pathless forest, to follow a trail, to circumvent the wild denizens of the woods; and, on the other hand, there would be the philosophy of life which the primitive man, with little external aid, would evolve from

original observation and cogitation. It is our good fortune to know such a man ; but it is difficult to present him to a scientific and cavilling generation. He emigrated from somewhat limited conditions in Vermont, at an early age, nearly half a century ago, and sought freedom for his natural development backward in the wilds of the Adirondacks. Sometimes it is a love of adventure and freedom that sends men out of the more civilized conditions into the less ; sometimes it is a constitutional physical lassitude which leads them to prefer the rod to the hoe, the trap to the sickle, and the society of bears to town-meetings and taxes. I think that Old Mountain Phelps had merely the instincts of the primitive man, and never any hostile civilizing intent as to the wilderness into which he plunged. Why should he want to slash away the forest, and plough up the ancient mould, when it is infinitely pleasanter to roam about in the leafy solitudes, or sit upon a mossy log and listen to the chatter of birds and the stir of beasts? Are there not trout in the streams, gum exuding from the spruce, sugar in

the maples, honey in the hollow trees, fur on the sables, warmth in hickory-logs? Will not a few days' planting and scratching in the "open" yield potatoes and rye? And, if there is steadier diet needed than venison and bear, is the pig an expensive animal? If Old Phelps bowed to the prejudice or fashion of his age (since we have come out of the tertiary state of things), and reared a family, built a frame-house in a secluded nook by a cold spring, planted about it some apple-trees and a rudimentary garden, and installed a group of flaming sunflowers by the door, I am convinced that it was a concession that did not touch his radical character; that is to say, it did not impair his reluctance to split oven-wood.

He was a true citizen of the wilderness. Thoreau would have liked him, as he liked Indians and woodchucks, and the smell of pine-forests; and, if Old Phelps had seen Thoreau, he would probably have said to him, "Why on airth, Mr. Thoreau, don't you live accordin' to your preachin'?" You might be misled by the shaggy suggestion of Old Phelps's given name —

Orson — into the notion that he was a mighty hunter, with the fierce spirit of the Berserkers in his veins. Nothing could be farther from the truth. The hirsute and grisly sound of Orson expresses only his entire affinity with the untamed and the natural, an uncouth but gentle passion for the freedom and wildness of the forest. Orson Phelps has only those unconventional and humorous qualities of the bear which make the animal so beloved in literature ; and one does not think of Old Phelps so much as a lover of nature, — to use the sentimental slang of the period, — as a part of nature itself.

His appearance at the time when as a “guide” he began to come into public notice fostered this impression, — a sturdy figure, with long body and short legs, clad in a woollen shirt and butternut-colored trousers repaired to the point of picturesqueness, his head surmounted by a limp, light-brown felt hat, frayed away at the top, so that his yellowish hair grew out of it like some nameless fern out of a pot. His tawny hair was long and tangled, matted now many

years past the possibility of being entered by a comb. His features were small and delicate, and set in the frame of a reddish beard, the razor having mowed away a clearing about the sensitive mouth, which was not seldom wreathed with a child-like and charming smile. Out of this hirsute environment looked the small gray eyes, set near together; eyes keen to observe, and quick to express change of thought; eyes that made you believe instinct can grow into philosophic judgment. His feet and hands were of aristocratic smallness, although the latter were not worn away by ablutions; in fact, they assisted his toilet to give you the impression that here was a man who had just come out of the ground, — a real son of the soil, whose appearance was partially explained by his humorous relation to soap. "Soap is a thing," he said, "that I hain't no kinder use for." His clothes seemed to have been put on him once for all, like the bark of a tree, a long time ago. The observant stranger was sure to be puzzled by the contrast of this realistic and uncouth exterior with the

internal fineness, amounting to refinement and culture, that shone through it all. What communion had supplied the place of our artificial breeding to this man?

Perhaps his most characteristic attitude was sitting on a log, with a short pipe in his mouth. If ever man was formed to sit on a log, it was Old Phelps. He was essentially a contemplative person. Walking on a country road, or anywhere in the "open," was irksome to him. He had a shambling, loose-jointed gait, not unlike that of the bear: his short legs bowed out, as if they had been more in the habit of climbing trees than of walking. On land, if we may use that expression, he was something like a sailor; but, once in the rugged trail or the unmarked route of his native forest, he was a different person, and few pedestrians could compete with him. The vulgar estimate of his contemporaries, that reckoned Old Phelps "lazy," was simply a failure to comprehend the conditions of his being. It is the unjustness of civilization that it sets up uniform and artificial standards for all persons.

The primitive man suffers by them much as the contemplative philosopher does, when one happens to arrive in this busy, fussy world.

If the appearance of Old Phelps attracts attention, his voice, when first heard, invariably startles the listener. A small, high-pitched, half-querulous voice, it easily rises into the shrillest falsetto; and it has a quality in it that makes it audible in all the tempests of the forest, or the roar of rapids, like the piping of a boatswain's whistle at sea in a gale. He has a way of letting it rise as his sentence goes on, or when he is opposed in argument, or wishes to mount above other voices in the conversation, until it dominates every thing. Heard in the depths of the woods, quavering aloft, it is felt to be as much a part of nature, an original force, as the north-west wind or the scream of the hen-hawk. When he is pottering about the camp-fire, trying to light his pipe with a twig held in the flame, he is apt to begin some philosophical observation in a small, slow, stumbling voice, which seems about to end in defeat; when he puts on some unsuspected force,

and the sentence ends in an insistent shriek. Horace Greeley had such a voice, and could regulate it in the same manner. But Phelps's voice is not seldom plaintive, as if touched by the dreamy sadness of the woods themselves.

When Old Mountain Phelps was discovered, he was, as the reader has already guessed, not understood by his contemporaries. His neighbors, farmers in the secluded valley, had many of them grown thrifty and prosperous, cultivating the fertile meadows, and vigorously attacking the timbered mountains; while Phelps, with not much more faculty of acquiring property than the roaming deer, had pursued the even tenor of the life in the forest on which he set out. They would have been surprised to be told that Old Phelps owned more of what makes the value of the Adirondacks than all of them put together; but it was true. This woodsman, this trapper, this hunter, this fisherman, this sitter on a log, and philosopher, was the real proprietor of the region over which he was ready to guide the stranger. It is true that he had not a monopoly

of its geography or its topography (though his knowledge was superior in these respects) ; there were other trappers, and more deadly hunters, and as intrepid guides : but Old Phelps was the discoverer of the beauties and sublimities of the mountains ; and, when city strangers broke into the region, he monopolized the appreciation of these delights and wonders of nature. I suppose, that, in all that country, he alone had noticed the sunsets, and observed the delightful processes of the seasons, taken pleasure in the woods for themselves, and climbed mountains solely for the sake of the prospect. He alone understood what was meant by “scenery.” In the eyes of his neighbors, who did not know that he was a poet and a philosopher, I dare say he appeared to be a slack provider, a rather shiftless trapper and fisherman ; and his passionate love of the forest and the mountains, if it was noticed, was accounted to him for idleness. When the appreciative tourist arrived, Phelps was ready, as guide, to open to him all the wonders of his possessions : he, for the first time, found an outlet for his en-

thusiasm, and a response to his own passion. It then became known what manner of man this was who had grown up here in the companionship of forests, mountains, and wild animals; that these scenes had highly developed in him the love of beauty, the æsthetic sense, delicacy of appreciation, refinement of feeling; and that, in his solitary wanderings and musings, the primitive man, self-taught, had evolved for himself a philosophy and a system of things. And it was a sufficient system, so long as it was not disturbed by external scepticism. When the outer world came to him, perhaps he had about as much to give to it as to receive from it; probably more, in his own estimation; for there is no conceit like that of isolation.

Phelps loved his mountains. He was the discoverer of Marcy, and caused the first trail to be cut to its summit, so that others could enjoy the noble views from its round and rocky top. To him it was, in noble symmetry and beauty, the chief mountain of the globe. To stand on it gave him, as he said, "a feeling of heaven up-

h'isted-ness." He heard with impatience that Mount Washington was a thousand feet higher, and he had a child-like incredulity about the surpassing sublimity of the Alps. Praise of any other elevation he seemed to consider a slight to Mount Marcy, and did not willingly hear it, any more than a lover hears the laudation of the beauty of another woman than the one he loves. When he showed us scenery he loved, it made him melancholy to have us speak of scenery elsewhere that was finer. And yet there was this delicacy about him, that he never over-praised what he brought us to see, any more than one would over-praise a friend of whom he was fond. I remember, that when for the first time, after a toilsome journey through the forest, the splendors of the Lower Ausable Pond broke upon our vision, — that low-lying silver lake, imprisoned by the precipices which it reflected in its bosom, — he made no outward response to our burst of admiration : only a quiet gleam of the eye showed the pleasure our appreciation gave him. As some one said, it was as if his friend had been admired,

—a friend about whom he was unwilling to say much himself, but well pleased to have others praise.

Thus far, we have considered Old Phelps as simply the product of the Adirondacks; not so much a self-made man (as the doubtful phrase has it) as a natural growth amid primal forces. But our study is interrupted by another influence, which complicates the problem, but increases its interest. No scientific observer, so far as we know, has ever been able to watch the development of the primitive man, played upon and fashioned by the hebdomadal iteration of "Greeley's Weekly Tri-bune." Old Phelps educated by the woods is a fascinating study; educated by the woods *and* the Tri-bune, he is a phenomenon. No one at this day can reasonably conceive exactly what this newspaper was to such a mountain valley as Keene. If it was not a Providence, it was a Bible. It was no doubt owing to it that Democrats became as scarce as moose in the Adirondacks. But it is not of its political aspect that I speak. I suppose that the

most cultivated and best informed portion of the earth's surface — the Western Reserve of Ohio, as free from conceit as it is from a suspicion that it lacks any thing — owes its pre-eminence solely to this comprehensive journal. It received from it every thing except a collegiate and a classical education, — things not to be desired, since they interfere with the self-manufacture of man. If Greek had been in this curriculum, its best known dictum would have been translated, "Make thyself." This journal carried to the community that fed on it not only a complete education in all departments of human practice and theorizing, but the more valuable and satisfying assurance that there was nothing more to be gleaned in the universe worth the attention of man. This panoplied its readers in completeness. Politics, literature, arts, sciences, universal brotherhood and sisterhood, — nothing was omitted; neither the poetry of Tennyson, nor the philosophy of Margaret Fuller; neither the virtues of association, nor of unbolted wheat. The laws of political economy and trade were laid down as

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positively and clearly as the best way to bake beans, and the saving truth that the millennium would come, and come only when every foot of the earth was subsoiled.

I do not say that Orson Phelps was the product of nature and the *Tri-bune*; but he cannot be explained without considering these two factors. To him Greeley was the *Tri-bune*, and the *Tri-bune* was Greeley; and yet I think he conceived of Horace Greeley as something greater than his newspaper, and perhaps capable of producing another journal equal to it in another part of the universe. At any rate, so completely did Phelps absorb this paper and this personality, that he was popularly known as "Greeley" in the region where he lived. Perhaps a fancied resemblance of the two men in the popular mind had something to do with this transfer of name. There is no doubt that Horace Greeley owed his vast influence in the country to his genius, nor much doubt that he owed his popularity in the rural districts to James Gordon Bennett; that is, to the personality of the man which the ingenious

Bennett impressed upon the country. That he despised the conventionalities of society, and was a sloven in his toilet, was firmly believed ; and the belief endeared him to the hearts of the people. To them “the old white coat”—an antique garment of unrenewed immortality—was as much a subject of idolatry as the *redingote grise* to the soldiers of the first Napoleon, who had seen it by the camp-fires on the Po and on the Borysthenes, and believed that he would come again in it to lead them against the enemies of France. The Greeley of the popular heart was clad as Bennett said he was clad. It was in vain, even pathetically in vain, that he published in his newspaper the full bill of his fashionable tailor (the fact that it was receipted may have excited the animosity of some of his contemporaries) to show that he wore the best broadcloth, and that the folds of his trousers followed the city fashion of falling outside his boots. If this revelation was believed, it made no sort of impression in the country. The rural readers were not to be wheedled out of their cherished conception of

the personal appearance of the philosopher of the Tri-bune.

That the Tri-bune taught Old Phelps to be more Phelps than he would have been without it was part of the independence-teaching mission of Greeley's paper. The subscribers were an army, in which every man was a general. And I am not surprised to find Old Phelps lately rising to the audacity of criticising his exemplar. In some recently-published observations by Phelps upon the philosophy of reading is laid down this definition: "If I understand the necessity or use of reading, it is to reproduce again what has been said or proclaimed before. Hence letters, characters, &c., are arranged in all the perfection they possibly can be, to show how certain language has been spoken by the original author. Now, to reproduce by reading, the reading should be so perfectly like the original, that no one standing out of sight could tell the reading from the first time the language was spoken."

This is illustrated by the highest authority at hand: "I have heard as good readers read, and

as poor readers, as almost any one in this region. If I have not heard as many, I have had a chance to hear nearly the extreme in variety. Horace Greeley ought to have been a good reader. Certainly but few, if any, ever knew every word of the English language at a glance more readily than he did, or knew the meaning of every mark of punctuation more clearly; but he could not read proper. ‘But how do you know?’ says one. From the fact, I heard him in the same lecture deliver or produce remarks in his own particular way, that, if they had been published properly in print, a proper reader would have reproduced them again the same way. In the midst of those remarks Mr. Greeley took up a paper, to reproduce by reading part of a speech that some one else had made; and his reading did not sound much more like the man that first read or made the speech than the clatter of a nail-factory sounds like a well-delivered speech. Now, the fault was not because Mr. Greeley did not know how to read as well as almost any man that ever lived, if not quite: but in his youth he

learned to read wrong ; and, as it is ten times harder to unlearn any thing than it is to learn it, he, like thousands of others, could never stop to unlearn it, but carried it on through his whole life.”

Whether a reader would be thanked for reproducing one of Horace Greeley’s lectures as he delivered it is a question that cannot detain us here ; but the teaching that he ought to do so, I think, would please Mr. Greeley.

The first dribblets of professional tourists and summer boarders who arrived among the Adirondack Mountains a few years ago found Old Phelps the chief and best guide of the region. Those who were eager to throw off the usages of civilization, and tramp and camp in the wilderness, could not but be well satisfied with the aboriginal appearance of this guide ; and when he led off into the woods, axe in hand, and a huge canvas sack upon his shoulders, they seemed to be following the Wandering Jew. The contents of this sack would have furnished a modern industrial exhibition, — provisions cooked and

raw, blankets, maple-sugar, tin-ware, clothing, pork, Indian-meal, flour, coffee, tea, &c. Phelps was the ideal guide: he knew every foot of the pathless forest; he knew all wood-craft, all the signs of the weather, or, what is the same thing, how to make a Delphic prediction about it. He was fisherman and hunter, and had been the comrade of sportsmen and explorers; and his enthusiasm for the beauty and sublimity of the region, and for its untamable wildness, amounted to a passion. He loved his profession; and yet it very soon appeared that he exercised it with reluctance for those who had neither ideality, nor love for the woods. Their presence was a profanation amid the scenery he loved. To guide into his private and secret haunts a party that had no appreciation of their loveliness disgusted him. It was a waste of his time to conduct flip-pant young men and giddy girls who made a noisy and irreverent lark of the expedition. And, for their part, they did not appreciate the benefit of being accompanied by a poet and a philosopher. They neither understood nor valued his

special knowledge and his shrewd observations : they didn't even like his shrill voice ; his quaint talk bored them. It was true, that, at this period, Phelps had lost something of the activity of his youth ; and the habit of contemplative sitting on a log and talking increased with the infirmities induced by the hard life of the woodsman. Perhaps he would rather talk, either about the woods-life or the various problems of existence, than cut wood, or busy himself in the drudgery of the camp. His critics went so far as to say, " Old Phelps is a fraud." They would have said the same of Socrates. Xantippe, who never appreciated the world in which Socrates lived, thought he was lazy. Probably Socrates could cook no better than Old Phelps, and no doubt went " gumming " about Athens with very little care of what was in the pot for dinner.

If the summer visitors measured Old Phelps, he also measured them by his own standards. He used to write out what he called " short-faced descriptions " of his comrades in the woods, which were never so flattering as true. It was

curious to see how the various qualities which are esteemed in society appeared in his eyes, looked at merely in their relation to the limited world he knew, and judged by their adaptation to the primitive life. It was a much subtler comparison than that of the ordinary guide, who rates his traveller by his ability to endure on a march, to carry a pack, use an oar, hit a mark, or sing a song. Phelps brought his people to a test of their naturalness and sincerity, tried by contact with the verities of the woods. If a person failed to appreciate the woods, Phelps had no opinion of him or his culture; and yet, although he was perfectly satisfied with his own philosophy of life, worked out by close observation of nature and study of the *Tri-bune*, he was always eager for converse with superior minds,—with those who had the advantage of travel and much reading, and, above all, with those who had any original “speckerlation.” Of all the society he was ever permitted to enjoy, I think he prized most that of Dr. Bushnell. The doctor enjoyed the quaint and first-hand observations of the old

woodsman, and Phelps found new worlds open to him in the wide ranges of the doctor's mind. They talked by the hour upon all sorts of themes, — the growth of the tree, the habits of wild animals, the migration of seeds, the succession of oak and pine, not to mention theology, and the mysteries of the supernatural.

I recall the bearing of Old Phelps, when, several years ago, he conducted a party to the summit of Mount Marcy by the way he had "bushed out." This was his mountain, and he had a peculiar sense of ownership in it. In a way, it was holy ground ; and he would rather no one should go on it who did not feel its sanctity. Perhaps it was a sense of some divine relation in it that made him always speak of it as "Mercy." To him this ridiculously dubbed Mount Marcy was always "Mount Mercy." By a like effort to soften the personal offensiveness of the nomenclature of this region, he invariably spoke of Dix's Peak, one of the southern peaks of the range, as "Dixie." It was some time since Phelps himself had visited his mountain ; and, as he pushed

on through the miles of forest, we noticed a kind of eagerness in the old man, as of a lover going to a rendezvous. Along the foot of the mountain flows a clear trout-stream, secluded and undisturbed in those awful solitudes, which is the "Mercy Brook" of the old woodsman. That day when he crossed it, in advance of his company, he was heard to say in a low voice, as if greeting some object of which he was shyly fond, "So, little brook, do I meet you once more?" and when we were well up the mountain, and emerged from the last stunted fringe of vegetation upon the rock-bound slope, I saw Old Phelps, who was still foremost, cast himself upon the ground, and heard him cry, with an enthusiasm that was intended for no mortal ear, "I'm with you once again!" His great passion very rarely found expression in any such theatrical burst. The bare summit that day was swept by a fierce, cold wind, and lost in an occasional chilling cloud. Some of the party, exhausted by the climb, and shivering in the rude wind, wanted a fire kindled and a cup of tea made, and thought

this the guide's business. Fire and tea were far enough from his thought. He had withdrawn himself quite apart, and wrapped in a ragged blanket, still and silent as the rock he stood on, was gazing out upon the wilderness of peaks. The view from Marcy is peculiar. It is without softness or relief. The narrow valleys are only dark shadows; the lakes are bits of broken mirror. From horizon to horizon there is a tumultuous sea of billows turned to stone. You stand upon the highest billow; you command the situation; you have surprised Nature in a high creative act; the mighty primal energy has only just become repose. This was a supreme hour to Old Phelps. Tea! I believe the boys succeeded in kindling a fire; but the enthusiastic stoic had no reason to complain of want of appreciation in the rest of the party. When we were descending, he told us, with mingled humor and scorn, of a party of ladies he once led to the top of the mountain on a still day, who began immediately to talk about the fashions! As he related the scene, stopping and facing us in the trail, his mild, far-

in eyes came to the front, and his voice rose with his language to a kind of scream.

“Why, there they were, right before the greatest view they ever saw, talkin’ about the *fashions!*”

Impossible to convey the accent of contempt in which he pronounced the word “fashions,” and then added, with a sort of regretful bitterness, —

“I was a great mind to come down, and leave ’em there.”

In common with the Greeks, Old Phelps personified the woods, mountains, and streams. They had not only personality, but distinctions of sex. It was something beyond the characterization of the hunter, which appeared, for instance, when he related a fight with a panther, in such expressions as, “Then Mr. Panther thought he would see what he could do,” &c. He was in “imaginative sympathy” with all wild things. The afternoon we descended Marcy, we went away to the west, through the primeval forests, toward Avalanche and Colden, and followed the

course of the charming Opalescent. When we reached the leaping stream, Phelps exclaimed, —

“Here’s little Miss Opalescent!”

“Why don’t you say Mr. Opalescent?” some one asked.

“Oh, she’s too pretty!” And too pretty she was, with her foam-white and rainbow dress, and her downfalls, and fountain-like uprising. A bewitching young person we found her all that summer afternoon.

This sylph-like person had little in common with a monstrous lady whose adventures in the wilderness Phelps was fond of relating. She was built something on the plan of the mountains, and her ambition to explore was equal to her size. Phelps and the other guides once succeeded in raising her to the top of Marcy; but the feat of getting a hogshead of molasses up there would have been easier. In attempting to give us an idea of her magnitude that night, as we sat in the forest camp, Phelps hesitated a moment, while he cast his eye around the woods: “Waal, there *ain’t* no tree!”

It is only by recalling fragmentary remarks and incidents that I can put the reader in possession of the peculiarities of my subject; and this involves the wrenching of things out of their natural order and continuity, and introducing them abruptly, — an abruptness illustrated by the remark of “Old Man Hoskins” (which Phelps liked to quote), when one day he suddenly slipped down a bank into a thicket, and seated himself in a wasps’ nest: “I hain’t no business here; but here I be!”

The first time we went into camp on the Upper Ausable Pond, which has been justly celebrated as the most prettily set sheet of water in the region, we were disposed to build our shanty on the south side, so that we could have in full view the Gothics and that loveliest of mountain contours. To our surprise, Old Phelps, whose sentimental weakness for these mountains we knew, opposed this. His favorite camping-ground was on the north side, — a pretty site in itself, but with no special view. In order to enjoy the lovely mountains, we should be obliged to row out into

the lake: we wanted them always before our eyes, — at sunrise and sunset, and in the blaze of noon. With deliberate speech, as if weighing our arguments and disposing of them, he replied, “Waal, now, them Gothics ain’t the kinder scenery you want ter *hog down*!”

It was on quiet Sundays in the woods, or in talks by the camp-fire, that Phelps came out as the philosopher, and commonly contributed the light of his observations. Unfortunate marriages, and marriages in general, were, on one occasion, the subject of discussion; and a good deal of darkness had been cast on it by various speakers; when Phelps suddenly piped up, from a log where he had sat silent, almost invisible, in the shadow and smoke, —

“Waal, now, when you’ve said all there is to be said, marriage is mostly for discipline.”

Discipline, certainly, the old man had, in one way or another; and years of solitary communing in the forest had given him, perhaps, a childlike insight into spiritual concerns. Whether he had formulated any creed, or what faith he

had, I never knew. Keene Valley had a reputation of not ripening Christians any more successfully than maize, the season there being short; and on our first visit it was said to contain but one Bible Christian, though I think an accurate census disclosed three. Old Phelps, who sometimes made abrupt remarks in trying situations, was not included in this census; but he was the disciple of supernaturalism in a most charming form. I have heard of his opening his inmost thoughts to a lady, one Sunday, after a noble sermon of Robertson's had been read in the cathedral stillness of the forest. His experience was entirely first-hand, and related with unconsciousness that it was not common to all. There was nothing of the mystic or the sentimentalist, only a vivid realism, in that nearness of God of which he spoke, — "as near sometimes as those trees," — and of the holy voice, that, in a time of inward struggle, had seemed to him to come from the depths of the forest, saying, "Poor soul, I am the way."

In later years there was a "revival" in Keene

Valley, the result of which was a number of young "converts," whom Phelps seemed to regard as a veteran might raw recruits, and to have his doubts what sort of soldiers they would make.

"Waal, Jimmy," he said to one of them, "you've kindled a pretty good fire with light wood. That's what we do of a dark night in the woods, you know; but we do it just so as we can look around and find the solid wood: so now put on your solid wood."

In the Sunday Bible-classes of the period Phelps was a perpetual anxiety to the others, who followed closely the printed lessons, and beheld with alarm his discursive efforts to get into freer air and light. His remarks were the most refreshing part of the exercises, but were outside of the safe path into which the others thought it necessary to win him from his "speckerlations." The class were one day on the verses concerning "God's word" being "written on the heart," and were keeping close to the shore, under the guidance of "Barnes's Notes," when Old Phelps made a dive to the bottom, and remarked that he had "thought

a good deal about the expression, 'God's word written on the heart,' and had been asking himself how that was to be done; and suddenly it occurred to him (having been much interested lately in watching the work of a photographer), that, when a photograph is going to be taken, all that has to be done is to put the object in position, and the sun makes the picture; and so he rather thought that all we had got to do was to put our hearts in place, and God would do the writin'."

Phelps's theology, like his science, is first-hand. In the woods, one day, talk ran on the Trinity as being nowhere asserted as a doctrine in the Bible; and some one suggested that the attempt to pack these great and fluent mysteries into one word must always be more or less unsatisfactory. "Ye-es," droned Phelps: "I never could see much speckerlation in that expression the *Trinity*. Why, they'd a good deal better say *Legion*."

The sentiment of the man about nature, or his poetic sensibility, was frequently not to be distinguished from a natural religion, and was always

tinged with the devoutness of Wordsworth's verse. Climbing slowly one day up the Balcony, — he was more than usually calm and slow, — he espied an exquisite fragile flower in the crevice of a rock, in a very lonely spot.

“It seems as if,” he said, or rather dreamed out, — “it seems as if the Creator had kept something just to look at himself.”

To a lady whom he had taken to Chapel Pond (a retired but rather uninteresting spot), and who expressed a little disappointment at its tameness, saying,

“Why, Mr. Phelps, the principal charm of this place seems to be its loneliness,” —

“Yes,” he replied in gentle and lingering tones, “and its *nativeness*. It lies here just where it was born.”

Rest and quiet had infinite attractions for him. A secluded opening in the woods was a “calm spot.” He told of seeing once, or rather being *in*, a circular rainbow. He stood on Indian Head, overlooking the Lower Lake, so that he saw the whole bow in the sky and the lake, and seemed to

be in the midst of it; "only at one place there was an indentation in it, where it rested on the lake, just enough to keep it from rolling off." This "resting" of the sphere seemed to give him great comfort.

One Indian-summer morning in October, some ladies found the old man sitting on his doorstep, smoking a short pipe. He gave no sign of recognition of their approach, except a twinkle of the eye, being evidently quite in harmony with the peaceful day. They stood there a full minute before he opened his mouth: then he did not rise, but slowly took his pipe from his mouth, and said in a dreamy way, pointing towards the brook, —

"Do you see that tree?" indicating a maple almost denuded of leaves, which lay like a yellow garment cast at its feet. "I've been watching that tree all the morning. There hain't been a breath of wind: but for hours the leaves have been falling, falling, just as you see them now; and at last it's pretty much bare." And after a pause, pensively: "Waal, I suppose its hour had come."

This contemplative habit of Old Phelps is wholly unappreciated by his neighbors ; but it has been indulged in no inconsiderable part of his life. Rising after a time, he said, "Now I want you to go with me and see my *golden city* I've talked so much about." He led the way to a hill-outlook, when suddenly, emerging from the forest, the spectators saw revealed the winding valley and its stream. He said quietly, "There is my golden city." Far below, at their feet, they saw that vast assemblage of birches and "popples," yellow as gold in the brooding noon-day, and slender spires rising out of the glowing mass. Without another word, Phelps sat a long time in silent content : it was to him, as Bunyan says, "a place desirous to be in."

Is this philosopher contented with what life has brought him? Speaking of money one day, when we had asked him if he should do differently if he had his life to live over again, he said, "Yes, but not about money. To have had hours such as I have had in these mountains, and with such men as Dr. Bushnell and Dr. Shaw and Mr.

Twichell, and others I could name, is worth all the money the world could give." He read character very well, and took in accurately the boy nature. "Tom" (an irrepressible, rather overdone specimen), — "Tom's a nice kind of a boy; but he's got to come up against a snubbin'-post one of these days." — "Boys!" he once said: "you can't git boys to take any kinder notice of scenery. I never yet saw a boy that would look a second time at a sunset. Now, a girl will *sometimes*; but even then it's instantaneous, — comes and goes like the sunset. As for me," still speaking of scenery, "these mountains about here, that I see every day, are no more to me, in one sense, than a man's farm is to him. What mostly interests me now is when I see some new freak or shape in the face of Nature."

In literature it may be said that Old Phelps prefers the best in the very limited range that has been open to him. Tennyson is his favorite among poets; an affinity explained by the fact that they are both lotos-eaters. Speaking of a lecture-room talk of Mr. Beecher's which he had

read, he said, "It filled my cup about as full as I callerlate to have it: there was a good deal of truth in it, and some poetry; waal, and a little spice too. We've got to have the spice, you know." He admired, for different reasons, a lecture by Greeley that he once heard, into which so much knowledge of various kinds was crowded, that he said he "made a reg'lar gobble of it." He was not without discrimination, which he exercised upon the local preaching when nothing better offered. Of one sermon he said, "The man began way back at the creation, and just preached right along down; and he didn't say nothing, after all. It just seemed to me as if he was tryin' to git up a kind of a fix-up."

Old Phelps used words sometimes like algebraic signs, and had a habit of making one do duty for a season together for all occasions. "Speckerlation" and "callerlation" and "fix-up" are specimens of words that were prolific in expression. An unusual expression, or an unusual article, would be characterized as a "kind of a scientific literary git-up."

“What is the programme for to-morrow?” I once asked him. “Waal, I callerlate, if they rig up the callerlation they callerlate on, we’ll go to the Boreas.” Starting out for a day’s tramp in the woods, he would ask whether we wanted to take a “reg’lar walk, or a random scoot,” — the latter being a plunge into the pathless forest. When he was on such an expedition, and became entangled in dense brush, and maybe a network of “slash” and swamp, he was like an old wizard, as he looked here and there, seeking a way, peering into the tangle, or withdrawing from a thicket, and muttering to himself, “There ain’t no speckerlation there.” And when the way became altogether inscrutable, — “Waal, this is a reg’lar random scoot of a rigmarole.” As some one remarked, “The dictionary in his hands is like clay in the hands of the potter.” A petrification was a “kind of a hard-wood chemical git-up.”

There is no conceit, we are apt to say, like that born of isolation from the world, and there are no such conceited people as those who have lived all their lives in the woods. Phelps was, however,

unsophisticated in his until the advent of strangers into his life, who brought in literature and various other disturbing influences. I am sorry to say that the effect has been to take off something of the bloom of his simplicity, and to elevate him into an oracle. I suppose this is inevitable as soon as one goes into print; and Phelps has gone into print in the local papers. He has been bitten with the literary "git-up." Justly regarding most of the Adirondack literature as a "perfect fizzle," he has himself projected a work, and written much on the natural history of his region. Long ago he made a large map of the mountain country; and, until recent surveys, it was the only one that could lay any claim to accuracy. His history is no doubt original in form, and unconventional in expression. Like most of the writers of the seventeenth century, and the court ladies and gentlemen of the eighteenth century, he is an independent speller. Writing of his work on the Adirondacks, he says, "If I should ever live to get this wonderful thing written, I expect it will show one thing, if no more;

and that is, that every thing has an opposite. I expect to show in this that literature has an opposite, if I do not show any thing els. We could not enjoy the blessings and happiness of riteousness if we did not know innicity was in the world : in fact, there would be no riteousness without innicity." Writing also of his great enjoyment of being in the woods, especially since he has had the society there of some people he names, he adds, "And since I have Literature, Siance, and Art all spread about on the green moss of the mountain woods or the gravell banks of a cristle stream, it seems like finding roses, honeysuckles, and violets on a crisp brown cliff in December. You know I don't believe much in the religion of seramony ; but any riteous thing that has life and spirit in it is food for me." I must not neglect to mention an essay, continued in several numbers of his local paper, on "The Growth of the Tree," in which he demolishes the theory of Mr. Greeley, whom he calls "one of the best vegetable philosophers," about "growth without seed." He treats of the office of sap :

“All trees have some kind of sap and some kind of operation of sap flowing in their season,” — the dissemination of seeds, the processes of growth, the power of healing wounds, the proportion of roots to branches, &c. Speaking of the latter, he says, “I have thought it would be one of the greatest curiosities on earth to see a thrifty growing maple or elm, that had grown on a deep soil interval to be two feet in diameter, to be raised clear into the air with every root and fibre down to the minutest thread, all entirely cleared of soil, so that every particle could be seen in its natural position. I think it would astonish even the wise ones.” From his instinctive sympathy with nature, he often credits vegetable organism with “instinctive judgment.” “Observation teaches us that a tree is given powerful instincts, which would almost appear to amount to judgment in some cases, to provide for its own wants and necessities.”

Here our study must cease. When the primitive man comes into literature, he is no longer primitive.



VI.

CAMPING OUT.

IT seems to be agreed that civilization is kept up only by a constant effort : Nature claims its own speedily when the effort is relaxed. If you clear a patch of fertile ground in the forest, uproot the stumps, and plant it, year after year, in potatoes and maize, you say you have subdued it. But, if you leave it for a season or two, a kind of barbarism seems to steal out upon it from the circling woods ; coarse grass and brambles cover it ; bushes spring up in a wild tangle ; the raspberry and the blackberry flower and fruit, and the humorous bear feeds upon them. The last state of that ground is worse than the first.

Perhaps the cleared spot is called Ephesus.

There is a splendid city on the plain ; there are temples and theatres on the hills ; the commerce of the world seeks its port ; the luxury of the Orient flows through its marble streets. You are there one day when the sea has receded : the plain is a pestilent marsh ; the temples, the theatres, the lofty gates, have sunken and crumbled, and the wild-brier runs over them ; and, as you grow pensive in the most desolate place in the world, a bandit lounges out of a tomb, and offers to relieve you of all that which creates artificial distinctions in society. The higher the civilization has risen, the more abject is the desolation of barbarism that ensues. The most melancholy spot in the Adirondacks is not a tamarack-swamp, where the traveller wades in moss and mire, and the atmosphere is composed of equal active parts of black-flies, mosquitoes, and midges. It is the village of the Adirondack Iron-Works, where the streets of gaunt houses are falling to pieces, tenantless ; the factory-wheels have stopped ; the furnaces are in ruins ; the iron and wooden machinery is strewn about in helpless

detachment; and heaps of charcoal, ore, and slag, proclaim an arrested industry. Beside this deserted village, even Calamity Pond, shallow, sedgy, with its ragged shores of stunted firs, and its melancholy shaft that marks the spot where the proprietor of the iron-works accidentally shot himself, is cheerful.

The instinct of barbarism that leads people periodically to throw aside the habits of civilization, and seek the freedom and discomfort of the woods, is explicable enough; but it is not so easy to understand why this passion should be strongest in those who are most refined, and most trained in intellectual and social fastidiousness. Philistinism and shoddy do not like the woods, unless it becomes fashionable to do so; and then, as speedily as possible, they introduce their artificial luxuries, and reduce the life in the wilderness to the vulgarity of a well-fed picnic. It is they who have strewn the Adirondacks with paper collars and tin cans. The real enjoyment of camping and tramping in the woods lies in a return to primitive conditions of lodging, dress,

and food, in as total an escape as may be from the requirements of civilization. And it remains to be explained why this is enjoyed most by those who are most highly civilized. It is wonderful to see how easily the restraints of society fall off. Of course it is not true that courtesy depends upon clothes with the best people; but, with others, behavior hangs almost entirely upon dress. Many good habits are easily got rid of in the woods. Doubt sometimes seems to be felt whether Sunday is a legal holiday there. It becomes a question of casuistry with a clergyman whether he may shoot at a mark on Sunday, if none of his congregation are present. He intends no harm: he only gratifies a curiosity to see if he can hit the mark. Where shall he draw the line? Doubtless he might throw a stone at a chipmunk, or shout at a loon. Might he fire at a mark with an air-gun that makes no noise? He will not fish or hunt on Sunday (although he is no more likely to catch any thing that day than on any other); but may he eat trout that the guide has caught on Sunday, if the guide swears

he caught them Saturday night? Is there such a thing as a vacation in religion? How much of our virtue do we owe to inherited habits?

I am not at all sure whether this desire to camp outside of civilization is creditable to human nature, or otherwise. We hear sometimes that the Turk has been merely camping for four centuries in Europe. I suspect that many of us are, after all, really camping temporarily in civilized conditions; and that going into the wilderness is an escape, longed for, into our natural and preferred state. Consider what this "camping out" is, that is confessedly so agreeable to people most delicately reared. I have no desire to exaggerate its delights.

The Adirondack wilderness is essentially unbroken. A few bad roads that penetrate it, a few jolting wagons that traverse them, a few barn-like boarding-houses on the edge of the forest, where the boarders are soothed by patent coffee, and stimulated to unnatural gayety by Japan tea, and experimented on by unique cookery, do little to destroy the savage fascination of the region.

In half an hour, at any point, one can put himself into solitude and every desirable discomfort. The party that covets the experience of the camp comes down to primitive conditions of dress and equipment. There are guides and porters to carry the blankets for beds, the raw provisions, and the camp equipage; and the motley party of the temporarily decivilized files into the woods, and begins, perhaps by a road, perhaps on a trail, its exhilarating and weary march. The exhilaration arises partly from the casting aside of restraint, partly from the adventure of exploration; and the weariness, from the interminable toil of bad walking, a heavy pack, and the grim monotony of trees and bushes, that shut out all prospect, except an occasional glimpse of the sky. Mountains are painfully climbed, streams forded, lonesome lakes paddled over, long and muddy "carries" traversed. Fancy this party the victim of political exile, banished by the law, and a more sorrowful march could not be imagined; but the voluntary hardship becomes pleasure, and it is undeniable that the spirits of the party rise as the difficulties increase.

For this straggling and stumbling band the world is young again : it has come to the beginning of things ; it has cut loose from tradition, and is free to make a home anywhere : the movement has all the promise of a revolution. All this virginal freshness invites the primitive instincts of play and disorder. The free range of the forests suggests endless possibilities of exploration and possession. Perhaps we are treading where man since the creation never trod before ; perhaps the waters of this bubbling spring, which we deepen by scraping out the decayed leaves and the black earth, have never been tasted before, except by the wild denizens of these woods. We cross the trails of lurking animals, — paths that heighten our sense of seclusion from the world. The hammering of the infrequent woodpecker, the call of the lonely bird, the drumming of the solitary partridge, — all these sounds do but emphasize the lonesomeness of nature. The roar of the mountain brook, dashing over its bed of pebbles, rising out of the ravine, and spreading, as it were, a mist of sound

through all the forest (continuous beating waves, that have the rhythm of eternity in them), and the fitful movement of the air-tides through the balsams and firs and the giant pines,—how these grand symphonies shut out the little exasperations of our vexed life! It seems easy to begin life over again on the simplest terms. Probably it is not so much the desire of the congregation to escape from the preacher, or of the preacher to escape from himself, that drives sophisticated people into the wilderness, as it is the unconquered craving for primitive simplicity, the revolt against the everlasting dress-parade of our civilization. From this monstrous pomposity even the artificial rusticity of a Petit Trianon is a relief. It was only human nature that the jaded Frenchman of the regency should run away to the New World, and live in a forest-hut with an Indian squaw; although he found little satisfaction in his act of heroism, unless it was talked about at Versailles.

When our trampers come, late in the afternoon, to the bank of a lovely lake where they

purpose to enter the primitive life, every thing is waiting for them in virgin expectation. There is a little promontory jutting into the lake, and sloping down to a sandy beach, on which the waters idly lapse, and shoals of red-fins and shiners come to greet the stranger; the forest is untouched by the axe; the tender green sweeps the water's edge; ranks of slender firs are marshalled by the shore; clumps of white-birch stems shine in satin purity among the ever-greens; the boles of giant spruces, maples, and oaks, lifting high their crowns of foliage, stretch away in endless galleries and arcades; through the shifting leaves the sunshine falls upon the brown earth; overhead are fragments of blue sky; under the boughs and in chance openings appear the bluer lake and the outline of the gracious mountains. The discoverers of this paradise, which they have entered to destroy, note the babbling of the brook that flows close at hand; they hear the splash of the leaping fish; they listen to the sweet, metallic song of the evening thrush, and the chatter of the red

squirrel, who angrily challenges their right to be there. But the moment of sentiment passes. This party has come here to eat and to sleep, and not to encourage Nature in her poetic attitudinizing.

The spot for a shanty is selected. This side shall be its opening, towards the lake; and in front of it the fire, so that the smoke shall drift into the hut, and discourage the mosquitoes; yonder shall be the cook's fire and the path to the spring. The whole colony bestir themselves in the foundation of a new home, — an enterprise that has all the fascination, and none of the danger, of a veritable new settlement in the wilderness. The axes of the guides resound in the echoing spaces; great trunks fall with a crash; vistas are opened towards the lake and the mountains. The spot for the shanty is cleared of underbrush; forked stakes are driven into the ground, cross-pieces are laid on them, and poles sloping back to the ground. In an incredible space of time there is the skeleton of a house, which is entirely open in front. The roof and

sides must be covered. For this purpose the trunks of great spruces are skinned. The woodman rims the bark near the foot of the tree, and again six feet above, and slashes it perpendicularly ; then, with a blunt stick, he crowds off this thick hide exactly as an ox is skinned. It needs but a few of these skins to cover the roof ; and they make a perfectly water-tight roof, except when it rains. Meantime, busy hands have gathered boughs of the spruce and the feathery balsam, and shingled the ground underneath the shanty for a bed. It is an aromatic bed : in theory it is elastic and consoling. Upon it are spread the blankets. The sleepers, of all sexes and ages, are to lie there in a row, their feet to the fire, and their heads under the edge of the sloping roof. Nothing could be better contrived. The fire is in front : it is not a fire, but a conflagration — a vast heap of green logs set on fire — of pitch, and split dead-wood, and crackling balsams, raging and roaring. By the time twilight falls, the cook has prepared supper. Every thing has been cooked in a tin pail and a skillet, —

potatoes, tea, pork, mutton, slapjacks. You wonder how every thing could have been prepared in so few utensils. When you eat, the wonder ceases: every thing might have been cooked in one pail. It is a noble meal; and nobly is it disposed of by these amateur savages, sitting about upon logs and roots of trees. Never were there such potatoes, never beans that seemed to have more of the bean in them, never such curly pork, never trout with more Indian-meal on them, never mutton more distinctly sheepy; and the tea, drunk out of a tin cup, with a lump of maple-sugar dissolved in it,—it is the sort of tea that takes hold, lifts the hair, and disposes the drinker to anecdote and hilariousness. There is no deception about it: it tastes of tannin and spruce and creosote. Every thing, in short, has the flavor of the wilderness and a free life. It is idyllic. And yet, with all our sentimentality, there is nothing feeble about the cooking. The slapjacks are a solid job of work, made to last, and not go to pieces in a person's stomach like a trivial bun: we might record on them, in cunei-

form characters, our incipient civilization; and future generations would doubtless turn them up as Acadian bricks. Good, robust victuals are what the primitive man wants.

Darkness falls suddenly. Outside the ring of light from our conflagration the woods are black. There is a tremendous impression of isolation and lonesomeness in our situation. We are the prisoners of the night. The woods never seemed so vast and mysterious. The trees are gigantic. There are noises that we do not understand, — mysterious winds passing overhead, and rambling in the great galleries, tree-trunks grinding against each other, undefinable stirs and uneasinesses. The shapes of those who pass into the dimness are outlined in monstrous proportions. The spectres, seated about in the glare of the fire, talk about appearances and presentiments and religion. The guides cheer the night with bear-fights, and catamount encounters, and frozen-to-death experiences, and simple tales of great prolixity and no point, and jokes of primitive lucidity. We hear catamounts, and the stealthy

tread of things in the leaves, and the hooting of owls, and, when the moon rises, the laughter of the loon. Every thing is strange, spectral, fascinating.

By and by we get our positions in the shanty for the night, and arrange the row of sleepers. The shanty has become a smoke-house by this time: waves of smoke roll into it from the fire. It is only by lying down, and getting the head well under the eaves, that one can breathe. No one can find her "things;" nobody has a pillow. At length the row is laid out, with the solemn protestation of intention to sleep. The wind, shifting, drives away the smoke. Good-night is said a hundred times; positions are re-adjusted, more last words, new shifting about, final remarks; it is all so comfortable and romantic; and then silence. Silence continues for a minute. The fire flashes up; all the row of heads is lifted up simultaneously to watch it; showers of sparks sail aloft into the blue night; the vast vault of greenery is a fairy spectacle. How the sparks mount and twinkle and disappear like tropical

fire-flies, and all the leaves murmur, and clap their hands! Some of the sparks do not go out: we see them flaming in the sky when the flame of the fire has died down. Well, good-night, good-night. More folding of the arms to sleep; more grumbling about the hardness of a hand-bag, or the insufficiency of a pocket-handkerchief, for a pillow. Good-night. Was that a remark? — something about a root, a stub in the ground sticking into the back. “You couldn’t lie along a hair?” — “Well, no: here’s another stub.” It needs but a moment for the conversation to become general, — about roots under the shoulder, stubs in the back, a ridge on which it is impossible for the sleeper to balance, the non-elasticity of boughs, the hardness of the ground, the heat, the smoke, the chilly air. Subjects of remarks multiply. The whole camp is awake, and chattering like an aviary. The owl is also awake; but the guides who are asleep outside make more noise than the owls. Water is wanted, and is handed about in a dipper. Everybody is yawning; everybody is now determined to go to sleep

in good earnest. A last good-night. There is an appalling silence. It is interrupted in the most natural way in the world. Somebody has got the start, and gone to sleep. He proclaims the fact. He seems to have been brought up on the seashore, and to know how to make all the deep-toned noises of the restless ocean. He is also like a war-horse; or, it is suggested, like a saw-horse. How malignantly he snorts, and breaks off short, and at once begins again in another key! One head is raised after another.

“Who is that?”

“Somebody punch him.”

“Turn him over.”

“Reason with him.”

The sleeper is turned over. The turn was a mistake. He was before, it appears, on his most agreeable side. The camp rises in indignation. The sleeper sits up in bewilderment. Before he can go off again, two or three others have preceded him. They are all alike. You never can judge what a person is when he is awake. There are here half a dozen disturbers of the peace who

should be put in solitary confinement. At midnight, when a philosopher crawls out to sit on a log by the fire, and smoke a pipe, a duet in tenor and mezzo-soprano is going on in the shanty, with a chorus always coming in at the wrong time. Those who are not asleep want to know why the smoker doesn't go to bed. He is requested to get some water, to throw on another log, to see what time it is, to note whether it looks like rain. A buzz of conversation arises. She is sure she heard something behind the shanty. He says it is all nonsense. "Perhaps, however, it might be a mouse."

"Mercy! Are there mice?"

"Plenty."

"Then that's what I heard nibbling by my head. I sha'n't sleep a wink! Do they bite?"

"No, they nibble; scarcely ever take a full bite out."

"It's horrid!"

Towards morning it grows chilly; the guides have let the fire go out; the blankets will slip down. Anxiety begins to be expressed about the dawn.

“What time does the sun rise?”

“Awful early. Did you sleep?”

“Not a wink. And you?”

“In spots. I’m going to dig up this root as soon as it is light enough.”

“See that mist on the lake, and the light just coming on the Gothics! I’d no idea it was so cold: all the first part of the night I was roasted.”

“What were they talking about all night?”

When the party crawls out to the early breakfast, after it has washed its faces in the lake, it is disorganized, but cheerful. Nobody admits much sleep; but everybody is refreshed, and declares it delightful. It is the fresh air all night that invigorates; or maybe it is the tea, or the slapjacks. The guides have erected a table of spruce bark, with benches at the sides; so that breakfast is taken in form. It is served on tin plates and oak chips. After breakfast begins the day’s work. It may be a mountain-climbing expedition, or rowing and angling in the lake, or fishing for trout in some stream two or three miles distant. Nobody can stir far from camp without

a guide. Hammocks are swung, bowers are built, novel-reading begins, worsted work appears, cards are shuffled and dealt. The day passes in absolute freedom from responsibility to one's self. At night, when the expeditions return, the camp resumes its animation. Adventures are recounted, every statement of the narrator being disputed and argued. Everybody has become an adept in wood-craft; but nobody credits his neighbor with like instinct. Society getting resolved into its elements, confidence is gone.

Whilst the hilarious party are at supper, a drop or two of rain falls. The head guide is appealed to. Is it going to rain? He says it does rain. But will it be a rainy night? The guide goes down to the lake, looks at the sky, and concludes, that, if the wind shifts a p'int more, there is no telling what sort of weather we shall have. Meantime the drops patter thicker on the leaves overhead, and the leaves, in turn, pass the water down to the table; the sky darkens; the wind rises; there is a kind of shiver in the woods; and we

scud away into the shanty, taking the remains of our supper, and eating it as best we can. The rain increases. The fire sputters and fumes. All the trees are dripping, dripping, and the ground is wet. We cannot step out-doors without getting a drenching. Like sheep, we are penned in the little hut, where no one can stand erect. The rain swirls into the open front, and wets the bottom of the blankets. The smoke drives in. We curl up, and enjoy ourselves. The guides at length conclude that it is going to be damp. The dismal situation sets us all into good spirits; and it is later than the night before when we crawl under our blankets, sure this time of a sound sleep, lulled by the storm and the rain resounding on the bark roof. How much better off we are than many a shelterless wretch! We are as snug as dry herrings. At the moment, however, of dropping off to sleep, somebody unfortunately notes a drop of water on his face; this is followed by another drop; in an instant a stream is established. He moves his head to a dry place. Scarcely has he done so, when he feels a damp-

ness in his back. Reaching his hand outside, he finds a puddle of water soaking through his blanket. By this time, somebody inquires if it is possible that the roof leaks. One man has a stream of water under him; another says it is coming into his ear. The roof appears to be a discriminating sieve. Those who are dry see no need of such a fuss. The man in the corner spreads his umbrella, and the protective measure is resented by his neighbor. In the darkness there is recrimination. One of the guides, who is summoned, suggests that the rubber blankets be passed out, and spread over the roof. The inmates dislike the proposal, saying that a shower-bath is no worse than a tub-bath. The rain continues to soak down. The fire is only half alive. The bedding is damp. Some sit up, if they can find a dry spot to sit on, and smoke. Heartless observations are made. A few sleep. And the night wears on. The morning opens cheerless. The sky is still leaking, and so is the shanty. The guides bring in a half-cooked breakfast. The roof is patched up. There are reviving signs of

breaking away, delusive signs that create momentary exhilaration. Even if the storm clears, the woods are soaked. There is no chance of stirring. The world is only ten feet square.

This life, without responsibility or clean clothes, may continue as long as the reader desires. There are those who would like to live in this free fashion forever, taking rain and sun as heaven pleases ; and there are some souls so constituted that they cannot exist more than three days without their worldly baggage. Taking the party altogether, from one cause or another it is likely to strike camp sooner than was intended. And the stricken camp is a melancholy sight. The woods have been despoiled ; the stumps are ugly ; the bushes are scorched ; the pine-leaf-strewn earth is trodden into mire ; the landing looks like a cattle-ford ; the ground is littered with all the unsightly *débris* of a hand-to-hand life ; the dismantled shanty is a shabby object ; the charred and blackened logs, where the fire blazed, suggest the extinction of family life. Man has wrought his usual wrong upon Nature, and he can

save his self-respect only by moving to virgin forests.

And move to them he will, the next season, if not this. For he who has once experienced the fascination of the woods-life never escapes its enticement : in the memory nothing remains but its charm.



HOW SPRING CAME IN NEW ENGLAND.



'74.

HOW SPRING CAME IN NEW ENGLAND.

BY A READER OF "'93."



NEW ENGLAND is the battle-ground of the seasons. It is La Vendée. To conquer it is only to begin the fight. When it is completely subdued, what kind of weather have you? None whatever.

What is this New England? A country? No: a camp. It is alternately invaded by the hyperborean legions and by the wilting sirens of the tropics. Icicles hang always on its northern heights; its seacoasts are fringed with mosquitoes. There is for a third of the year a contest between the icy air of the pole and the warm wind of the gulf. The result of this is a compromise: the

compromise is called Thaw. It is the normal condition in New England. The New-Englander is a person who is always just about to be warm and comfortable. This is the stuff of which heroes and martyrs are made. A person thoroughly heated or frozen is good for nothing. Look at the Bongos. Examine (on the map) the Dog-Rib nation. The New-Englander, by incessant activity, hopes to get warm. Edwards made his theology. Thank God, New England is not in Paris!

Hudson's Bay, Labrador, Grinnell's Land, a whole zone of ice and walruses, make it unpleasant for New England. This icy cover, like the lid of a pot, is always suspended over it: when it shuts down, that is winter. This would be intolerable, were it not for the Gulf Stream. The Gulf Stream is a benign, liquid force, flowing from under the ribs of the equator, — a white knight of the South going up to battle the giant of the North. The two meet in New England, and have it out there.

This is the theory; but, in fact, the Gulf

Stream is mostly a delusion as to New England. For Ireland it is quite another thing. Potatoes ripen in Ireland before they are planted in New England. That is the reason the Irish emigrate : they desire two crops the same year. The Gulf Stream gets shunted off from New England by the formation of the coast below : besides, it is too shallow to be of any service. Icebergs float down against its surface-current, and fill all the New-England air with the chill of death till June : after that the fogs drift down from Newfoundland. There never was such a mockery as this Gulf Stream. It is like the English influence on France, on Europe. Pitt was an iceberg.

Still New England survives. To what purpose? I say, as an example : the politician says, to produce "Poor Boys." Bah ! The poor boy is an anachronism in civilization. He is no longer poor, and he is not a boy. In Tartary they would hang him for sucking all the asses' milk that belongs to the children : in New England he has all the cream from the Public Cow,

What can you expect in a country where one knows not to-day what the weather will be to-morrow? Climate makes the man. Suppose he, too, dwells on the Channel Islands, where he has all climates, and is superior to all. Perhaps he will become the prophet, the seer, of his age, as he is its Poet. The New-Englander is the man without a climate. Why is his country recognized? You won't find it on any map of Paris.

And yet Paris is the universe. Strange anomaly! The greater must include the less; but how if the less leaks out? This sometimes happens.

And yet there are phenomena in that country worth observing. One of them is the conduct of Nature from the 1st of March to the 1st of June, or, as some say, from the vernal equinox to the summer solstice. As Tourmalain remarked, "You'd better observe the unpleasant than to be blind." This was in 802. Tourmalain is dead; so is Gross Alain; so is little Pec-Wee: we shall all be dead before things get any better.

That is the law. Without revolution there is nothing. What is revolution? It is turning society over, and putting the best underground for a fertilizer. Thus only will things grow. What has this to do with New England? In the language of that flash of social lightning, Béranger, "May the Devil fly away with me if I can see!"

Let us speak of the period in the year in New England when winter appears to hesitate. Except in the calendar, the action is ironical; but it is still deceptive. The sun mounts high: it is above the horizon twelve hours at a time. The snow gradually sneaks away in liquid repentance. One morning it is gone, except in shaded spots and close by the fences. From about the trunks of the trees it has long departed: the tree is a living thing, and its growth repels it. The fence is dead, driven into the earth in a rigid line by man: the fence, in short, is dogma: icy prejudice lingers near it.

The snow has disappeared; but the landscape is a ghastly sight, — bleached, dead. The trees

are stakes ; the grass is of no color ; and the bare soil is not brown with a healthful brown ; life has gone out of it. Take up a piece of turf : it is a clod, without warmth, inanimate. Pull it in pieces : there is no hope in it : it is a part of the past ; it is the refuse of last year. This is the condition to which winter has reduced the landscape. When the snow, which was a pall, is removed, you see how ghastly it is. The face of the country is sodden. It needs now only the south wind to sweep over it, full of the damp breath of death ; and that begins to blow. No prospect would be more dreary.

And yet the south wind fills credulous man with joy. He opens the window. He goes out, and catches cold. He is stirred by the mysterious coming of something. If there is sign of change nowhere else, we detect it in the newspaper. In sheltered corners of that truculent instrument for the diffusion of the prejudices of the few among the many begin to grow the violets of tender sentiment, the early greens of yearning. The poet feels the sap of the new

year before the marsh-willow. He blossoms in advance of the catkins. Man is greater than Nature. The poet is greater than man: he is nature on two legs, — ambulatory.

At first there is no appearance of conflict. The winter garrison seems to have withdrawn. The invading hosts of the South are entering without opposition. The hard ground softens; the sun lies warm upon the southern bank, and water oozes from its base. If you examine the buds of the lilac and the flowering shrubs, you cannot say that they are swelling; but the varnish with which they were coated in the fall to keep out the frost seems to be cracking. If the sugar-maple is hacked, it will bleed, — the pure white blood of Nature.

At the close of a sunny day the western sky has a softened aspect: its color, we say, has warmth in it. On such a day you may meet a caterpillar on the footpath, and turn out for him. The house-fly thaws out; a company of cheerful wasps take possession of a chamber-window. It is oppressive indoors at night, and the window

is raised. A flock of millers, born out of time, flutter in. It is most unusual weather for the season: it is so every year. The delusion is complete, when, on a mild evening, the tree-toads open their brittle-brattle chorus on the edge of the pond. The citizen asks his neighbor, "Did you hear the frogs last night?" That seems to open the new world. One thinks of his childhood and its innocence, and of his first loves. It fills one with sentiment and a tender longing, this voice of the tree-toad. Man is a strange being. Deaf to the prayers of friends, to the sermons and warnings of the church, to the calls of duty, to the pleadings of his better nature, he is touched by the tree-toad. The signs of the spring multiply. The passer in the street in the evening sees the maid-servant leaning on the area-gate in sweet converse with some one leaning on the other side; or in the park, which is still too damp for any thing but true affection, he sees her seated by the side of one who is able to protect her from the policeman, and hears her sigh, "How sweet it is to be with those we love to be with!"

All this is very well ; but next morning the newspaper nips these early buds of sentiment. The telegraph announces, “ Twenty feet of snow at Ogden, on the Pacific Road ; winds blowing a gale at Omaha, and snow still falling ; mercury frozen at Duluth ; storm-signals at Port Huron.”

Where now are your tree-toads, your young love, your early season? Before noon it rains ; by three o'clock it hails ; before night the bleak storm-cloud of the north-west envelops the sky ; a gale is raging, whirling about a tempest of snow. By morning the snow is drifted in banks, and two feet deep on a level. Early in the seventeenth century, Drebbel of Holland invented the weather-glass. Before that, men had suffered without knowing the degree of their suffering. A century later, Römer hit upon the idea of using mercury in a thermometer ; and Fahrenheit constructed the instrument which adds a new because distinct terror to the weather. Science names and registers the ills of life ; and yet it is a gain to know the names and habits of our enemies. It is with some satisfaction in our knowledge that we say the thermometer marks zero.

In fact, the wild beast called Winter, untamed, has returned, and taken possession of New England. Nature, giving up her melting mood, has retired into dumbness and white stagnation. But we are wise. We say it is better to have it now than later. We have a conceit of understanding things.

Extraordinary blindness !

The sun is in alliance with the earth. Between the two the snow is uncomfortable. Compelled to go, it decides to go suddenly. The first day there is slush with rain ; the second day, mud with hail ; the third day, a flood with sunshine. The thermometer declares that the temperature is delightful. Man shivers and sneezes. His neighbor dies of some disease newly named by science ; but he dies all the same as if it hadn't been newly named. Science has not discovered any name that is not fatal.

This is called the breaking-up of winter.

Nature seems for some days to be in doubt, not exactly able to stand still, not daring to put forth any thing tender. Man says that the worst

is over. If he should live a thousand years, he would be deceived every year. And this is called an age of scepticism. Man never believed in so many things as now: he never believed so much in himself. As to Nature, he knows her secrets: he can predict what she will do. He communicates with the next world by means of an alphabet which he has invented. He talks with souls at the other end of the spirit-wire. To be sure, neither of them says any thing; but they talk. Is not that something? He suspends the law of gravitation as to his own body—he has learned how to evade it—as tyrants suspend the legal writs of *habeas corpus*. When Gravitation asks for his body, she cannot have it. He says of himself, “I am infallible; I am sublime.” He believes all these things. He is master of the elements. Shakspeare sends him a poem just made, and as good a poem as the man could write himself. And yet this man—he goes out of doors without his overcoat, catches cold, and is buried in three days. “On the 21st of January,” exclaimed Mercier, “all kings felt for the

backs of their necks.” This might be said of all men in New England in the spring. This is the season that all the poets celebrate. Let us suppose that once, in Thessaly, there was a genial spring, and there was a poet who sang of it. All later poets have sung the same song. “*Voilà tout!*” That is the root of poetry.

Another delusion. We hear toward evening, high in air, the “conk” of the wild-geese. Looking up, you see the black specks of that adventurous triangle, winging along in rapid flight northward. Perhaps it takes a wide returning sweep, in doubt; but it disappears in the north. There is no mistaking that sign. This unmusical “conk” is sweeter than the “ker-chunk” of the bull-frog. Probably these birds are not idiots, and probably they turned back south again after spying out the nakedness of the land; but they have made their sign. Next day there is a rumor that somebody has seen a blue-bird. This rumor, unhappily for the bird (which will freeze to death), is confirmed. In less than three days everybody has seen a blue-

bird ; and favored people have heard a robin, or rather the yellow-breasted thrush, misnamed a robin in America. This is no doubt true : for angle-worms have been seen on the surface of the ground ; and, wherever there is any thing to eat, the robin is promptly on hand. About this time you notice, in protected, sunny spots, that the grass has a little color. But you say that it is the grass of last fall. It is very difficult to tell when the grass of last fall became the grass of this spring. It looks "warmed over." The green is rusty. The lilac-buds have certainly swollen a little, and so have those of the soft maple. In the rain the grass does not brighten as you think it ought to, and it is only when the rain turns to snow that you see any decided green color by contrast with the white. The snow gradually covers every thing very quietly, however. Winter comes back without the least noise or bustle, tireless, malicious, implacable. Neither party in the fight now makes much fuss over it ; and you might think that Nature had surrendered altogether, if you did not find about this time,

in the woods, on the edge of a snow-bank, the modest blossoms of the trailing arbutus, shedding their delicious perfume. The bravest are always the tenderest, says the poet. The season, in its blind way, is trying to express itself.

And it is assisted. There is a cheerful chatter in the trees. The blackbirds have come, and in numbers, households of them, villages of them, — communes, rather. They do not believe in God, these blackbirds. They think they can take care of themselves. We shall see. But they are well informed. They arrived just as the last snow-bank melted. One cannot say now that there is not greenness in the grass; not in the wide fields, to be sure, but on lawns and banks sloping south. The dark-spotted leaves of the dog-tooth violet begin to show. Even Fahrenheit's contrivance joins in the upward movement: the mercury has suddenly gone up from thirty degrees to sixty-five degrees. It is time for the ice-man. Ice has no sooner disappeared than we desire it.

There is a smile, if one may say so, in the

blue sky, and there is softness in the south wind. The song-sparrow is singing in the apple-tree. Another bird-note is heard, — two long, musical whistles, liquid but metallic. A brown bird this one, darker than the song-sparrow, and without the latter's light stripes, and smaller, yet bigger than the queer little chipping-bird. He wants a familiar name, this sweet singer, who appears to be a sort of sparrow. He is such a contrast to the blue-jays, who have arrived in a passion, as usual, screaming and scolding, the elegant, spoiled beauties! They wrangle from morning till night, these beautiful, high-tempered aristocrats.

Encouraged by the birds, by the bursting of the lilac-buds, by the peeping-up of the crocuses, by tradition, by the sweet flutterings of a double hope, another sign appears. This is the Easter bonnets, most delightful flowers of the year, "emblems of innocence, hope, devotion. Alas that they have to be worn under umbrellas, so much thought, freshness, feeling, tenderness, have gone into them! And a north-east storm

of rain, accompanied with hail, comes to crown all these virtues with that of self-sacrifice. The frail hat is offered up to the implacable season. In fact, Nature is not to be forestalled nor hurried in this way. Things cannot be pushed. Nature hesitates. The woman who does not hesitate in April is lost. The appearance of the bonnets is premature. The blackbirds see it. They assemble. For two days they hold a noisy convention, with high debate, in the tree-tops. Something is going to happen.

Say, rather, the usual thing is about to occur. There is a wind called Auster, another called Eurus, another called Septentrio, another Meridies, besides Aquilo, Vulturus, Africus. There are the eight great winds of the classical dictionary, — arsenal of mystery and terror and of the unknown, — besides the wind Euroaquilo of St. Luke. This is the wind that drives an apostle wishing to gain Crete upon the African Syrtis. If St. Luke had been tacking to get to Hyannis, this wind would have forced him into Holmes's Hole. The Euroaquilo is no respecter of persons.

These winds, and others unnamed and more terrible, circle about New England. They form a ring about it: they lie in wait on its borders, but only to spring upon it and harry it. They follow each other in contracting circles, in whirlwinds, in maelstroms of the atmosphere: they meet and cross each other, all at a moment. This New England is set apart: it is the exercise-ground of the weather. Storms bred elsewhere come here full-grown: they come in couples, in quartets, in choruses. If New England were not mostly rock, these winds would carry it off; but they would bring it all back again, as happens with the sandy portions. What sharp Eurus carries to Jersey, Africus brings back. When the air is not full of snow, it is full of dust. This is called one of the compensations of Nature.

This is what happened after the convention of the blackbirds: A moaning south wind brought rain; a south-west wind turned the rain to snow; what is called a zephyr, out of the west, drifted the snow; a north wind sent the mercury far

below freezing. Salt added to snow increases the evaporation and the cold. This was the office of the north-east wind: it made the snow damp, and increased its bulk; but then it rained a little, and froze, thawing at the same time. The air was full of fog and snow and rain. And then the wind changed, went back round the circle, reversing every thing, like dragging a cat by its tail. The mercury approached zero. This was nothing uncommon. We know all these winds. We are familiar with the different "forms of water."

All this was only the prologue, the overture. If one might be permitted to speak scientifically, it was only the tuning of the instruments. The opera was to come, — the Flying Dutchman of the air.

There is a wind called Euroclydon: it would be one of the Eumenides; only they are women. It is half-brother to the gigantic storm-wind of the equinox. The Euroclydon is not a wind: it is a monster. Its breath is frost. It has snow in its hair. It is something terrible. It peddles rheumatism, and plants consumption.

The Euroclydon knew just the moment to strike into the discord of the weather in New England. From its lair about Point Desolation, from the glaciers of the Greenland continent, sweeping round the coast, leaving wrecks in its track, it marched right athwart the other conflicting winds, churning them into a fury, and inaugurating chaos. It was the Marat of the elements. It was the revolution marching into the "dreaded wood of La Sandraie."

Let us sum it all up in one word: it was something for which there is no name.

Its track was destruction. On the sea it leaves wrecks. What does it leave on land? Funerals. When it subsides, New England is prostrate. It has left its legacy: this legacy is coughs and patent medicines. This is an epic; this is destiny. You think Providence is expelled out of New England? Listen!

Two days after Euroclydon, I found in the woods the hepatica—earliest of wildwood flowers, evidently not intimidated by the wild work of the armies trampling over New England—daring to

hold up its tender blossom. One could not but admire the quiet pertinacity of Nature. She had been painting the grass under the snow. In spots it was vivid green. There was a mild rain, — mild, but chilly. The clouds gathered, and broke away in light, fleecy masses. There was a softness on the hills. The birds suddenly were on every tree, glancing through the air, filling it with song, sometimes shaking rain-drops from their wings. The cat brings in one in his mouth. He thinks the season has begun, and the game-laws are off. He is fond of Nature, this cat, as we all are: he wants to possess it. At four o'clock in the morning there is a grand dress-rehearsal of the birds. Not all the pieces of the orchestra have arrived; but there are enough. The grass-sparrow has come. This is certainly charming. The gardener comes to talk about seeds: he uncovers the strawberries and the grape-vines, salts the asparagus-bed, and plants the peas. You ask if he planted them with a shot-gun. In the shade there is still frost in the ground. Nature, in fact, still hesitates,

puts forth one hepatica at a time, and waits to see the result; pushes up the grass slowly, perhaps draws it in at night.

This indecision we call Spring.

It becomes painful. It is like being on the rack for ninety days, expecting every day a reprieve. Men grow hardened to it, however.

This is the order with man, — hope, surprise, bewilderment, disgust, facetiousness. The people in New England finally become facetious about spring. This is the last stage: it is the most dangerous. When a man has come to make a jest of misfortune, he is lost. “It bores me to die,” said the journalist Carra to the headsmen at the foot of the guillotine: “I would like to have seen the continuation.” One is also interested to see how spring is going to turn out.

A day of sun, of delusive bird-singing, sight of the mellow earth, — all these begin to beget confidence. The night, even, has been warm. But what is this in the morning journal at breakfast? — “An area of low pressure is moving from the Tortugas north.” You shudder.

What is this Low Pressure itself, — it? It is something frightful, low, crouching, creeping, advancing; it is a foreboding; it is misfortune by telegraph; it is the “’93” of the atmosphere.

This low pressure is a creation of Old Prob. What is that? Old Prob. is the new deity of the Americans, greater than Æolus, more despotic than Sans-Culotte. The wind is his servitor, the lightning his messenger. He is a mystery made of six parts electricity, and one part “guess.” This deity is worshipped by the Americans; his name is on every man’s lips first in the morning; he is the Frankenstein of modern science. Housed at Washington, his business is to direct the storms of the whole country upon New England, and to give notice in advance. This he does. Sometimes he sends the storm, and then gives notice. This is mere playfulness on his part: it is all one to him. His great power is in the low pressure.

On the Bexar plains of Texas, among the hills of the Presidio, along the Rio Grande, low pressure is bred; it is nursed also in the Atchafalaya

swamps of Louisiana ; it moves by the way of Thibodeaux and Bonnet Carré. The south-west is a magazine of atmospheric disasters. Low pressure may be no worse than the others : it is better known, and is most used to inspire terror. It can be summoned any time also from the everglades of Florida, from the morasses of the Okeechobee.

When the New-Englander sees this in his newspaper, he knows what it means. He has twenty-four hours' warning ; but what can he do ? Nothing but watch its certain advance by telegraph. He suffers in anticipation. That is what Old Prob. has brought about, — suffering by anticipation. This low pressure advances against the wind. The wind is from the north-east. Nothing could be more unpleasant than a north-east wind ? Wait till low pressure joins it. Together they make spring in New England. A north-east storm from the south-west ! — there is no bitterer satire than this. It lasts three days. After that the weather changes into something winter-like.

A solitary song-sparrow, without a note of joy, hops along the snow to the dining-room window, and, turning his little head aside, looks up. He is hungry and cold. Little Minnette, clasping her hands behind her back, stands and looks at him, and says, "Po' birdie!" They appear to understand each other. The sparrow gets his crumbs; but he knows too much to let Minnette get hold of him. Neither of these little things could take care of itself in a New-England spring—not in the depths of it. This is what the father of Minnette, looking out of the window upon the wide waste of snow, and the evergreens bent to the ground with the weight of it, says, "It looks like the depths of spring." To this has man come: to his facetiousness has succeeded sarcasm. It is the first of May.

Then follows a day of bright sun and blue sky. The birds open the morning with a lively chorus. In spite of Auster, Euroclydon, low pressure, and the government bureau, things have gone forward. By the roadside, where the snow has just melted, the grass is of the color of emerald.

The heart leaps to see it. On the lawn there are twenty robins, lively, noisy, worm-seeking. Their yellow breasts contrast with the tender green of the newly-springing clover and herd's-grass. If they would only stand still, we might think the dandelions had blossomed. On an evergreen-bough, looking at them, sits a graceful bird, whose back is bluer than the sky. There is a red tint on the tips of the boughs of the hard maple. With Nature, color is life. See, already, green, yellow, blue, red! In a few days — is it not so? — through the green masses of the trees will flash the orange of the oriole, the scarlet of the tanager; perhaps to-morrow.

But, in fact, the next day opens a little sourly. It is almost clear overhead: but the clouds thicken on the horizon; they look leaden; they threaten rain. It certainly will rain: the air feels like rain, or snow. By noon it begins to snow, and you hear the desolate cry of the phœbe-bird. It is a fine snow, gentle at first; but it soon drives in swerving lines, for the wind is from the south-west, from the west, from the

north-east, from the zenith (one of the ordinary winds of New England), from all points of the compass. The fine snow becomes rain; it becomes large snow; it melts as it falls; it freezes as it falls. At last a storm sets in, and night shuts down upon the bleak scene.

During the night there is a change. It thunders and lightens. Toward morning there is a brilliant display of aurora borealis. This is a sign of colder weather.

The gardener is in despair; so is the sportsman. The trout take no pleasure in biting in such weather. Paragraphs appear in the newspapers, copied from the paper of last year, saying that this is the most severe spring in thirty years. Every one, in fact, believes that it is, and also that next year the spring will be early. Man is the most gullible of creatures.

And with reason: he trusts his eyes, and not his instinct. During this most sour weather of the year, the anemone blossoms; and, almost immediately after, the fairy pencil, the spring beauty, the dog-tooth violet, and the true violet.

In clouds and fog, and rain and snow, and all discouragement, Nature pushes on her forces with progressive haste and rapidity. Before one is aware, all the lawns and meadows are deeply green, the trees are opening their tender leaves. In a burst of sunshine the cherry-trees are white, the Judas-tree is pink, the hawthorns give a sweet smell. The air is full of sweetness; the world, of color.

In the midst of a chilling north-east storm the ground is strewed with the white-and-pink blossoms from the apple-trees. The next day the mercury stands at eighty degrees. Summer has come.

There was no Spring.

The winter is over. You think so? Robespierre thought the Revolution was over in the beginning of his last Thermidor. He lost his head after that.

When the first buds are set, and the corn is up, and the cucumbers have four leaves, a malicious frost steals down from the north and kills them in a night.

That is the last effort of spring. The mercury then mounts to ninety degrees. The season has been long, but, on the whole, successful. Many people survive it.



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Warner, Charles Dudley

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In the wilderness

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